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Introduction

[image]

Hi everyone!

My name is Koa, and I made this account to mainly read other people's fanfictions and write short stories. Most of my short stories stay in my notebook, and actually stay as short stories, but one day I was just thinking about a Warrior cats short story, and I came up with these characters and a whole plot, and decided it would be better as an actual book — so here we are, my first ever published story!

I have this entire book planned in one of my notebooks, with a chapter summary for me to write about. I even have each main character and their personality traits written down too. Keep in mind that this is my first story, so it won't be that great.

I'm super exited to write this story, and I hope you all enjoy reading it! I will welcome any feedback/criticism of this book, just please don't be mean about it. I've decided that I will read over each chapter before I publish it, and it may take a few days for me to have the chapter ready for publishing, so please don't comment things like "Update" or anything like that, because I don't want to feel rushed with this. Please respect that I'm only human, so I can't just magically create a whole well-written chapter out of thin air!

Also, I'm not going to do an allegiances page for any Clan but FernClan, because the characters in other Clans are mostly unnamed, and I hate having to write more than one Clan.

So, I present to you, A Splatter of Blood! Enjoy!

- Koa ＜3

FernClan

[image]

Leader: Cinderstar — *dark grey tabby molly with amber eyes*

Deputy: Dimlight — *light brown tabby tom with green eyes*

Medicine Cat: Mintleaf — *tortoiseshell molly with yellow eyes* (Apprentice: Dreampaw)

Warriors: ~ Appleseed — *light brown tabby tom with a white chest and paws and amber eyes*
~ Robinflight — *dark brown molly with amber eyes*
~ Spidervenom — *black tom with one white paw and amber eyes* (Apprentice: Duckpaw)
~ Greenwillow — *white molly with green eyes*
~ Flowerpetal — *black-and-white molly with amber eyes* (Apprentice: Silverpaw)
~ Thrushwhisker — *light grey tabby tom with green eyes*
~ Sunflower — *golden tabby molly with yellow eyes*
~ Deerhoof — *brown tabby tom with yellow eyes*
~ Tumbleweed — *brown-and-white tabby tom with yellow eyes*
~ Birdsong — *sand-coloured tom with blue eyes*
~ Foxclaw — *calico molly with yellow eyes* (Apprentice: Dawnpaw)
~ Alderbark — *dark ginger tabby tom with amber eyes* (Apprentice: Brightpaw)
~ Honeybee — *sand-coloured molly with amber eyes*
~ Daisystem — *white molly with sand-coloured tail and amber eyes*

Apprentices: ~ Dreampaw — *grey tabby tom with blue eyes* (Mentor: Mintleaf)
~ Silverpaw — *silver tabby molly with blue eyes* (Mentor: Flowerpetal)
~ Duskpaw — *dust-brown tabby tom with amber eyes* (Mentor: Spidervenom)
~ Dawnpaw — *pale gold tabby molly with a white chest and paws and yellow eyes* (Mentor: Foxclaw)

~ Brightpaw — *white molly with pale gold tabby patches and green eyes* (Mentor: Alderbark)

Queens: ~ Rosehoney — *ginger tabby molly with green eyes* (Kits: Amberkit and Thistlekit | Mate: Spidervenom)
~ Lilypad — *white molly with blue eyes* (Kits: Leopardkit, Treekit and Featherkit | Mate: Dimlight)

Kits: ~ Amberkit — *tortoiseshell molly with amber eyes* (Parents: Rosehoney and Spidervenom)
~ Thistlekit — *black tom with green eyes* (Parents: Rosehoney and Spidervenom)
~ Leopardkit — *white molly with brown flecks and blue eyes* (Parents: Lilypad and Dimlight)
~ Treekit — *brown tabby tom with green eyes* (Parents: Lilypad and Dimlight)
~ Featherkit — *white molly with blue eyes* (Parents: Lilypad and Dimlight)

Elders: ~ Halfleg — *dark grey tabby tom with half of his front right leg missing and amber eyes* (Oldest cat in FernClan)
~ Faunspeckle — *brown molly with lighter brown flecks and amber eyes*
~ Paleglow — *pale brown molly with blue eyes* (Former deputy)

Prologue

[image]

Confusion was a feeling that often greeted Mintleaf's mind; over and over again, the medicine cat found herself deep in a pool of confusion, most of which had been caused by her own ancestors. The wise cats that were supposed to be the three Clans's guardian angels; their saviours, even.

StarClan.

Almost every night since the two ginger-and-white kits were made into apprentices, StarClan themselves made their way into Mintleaf's dreams. It was normal for her...a routine, and the medicine cat found herself drifting off to sleep knowing that she'd wake up, buried deep in her own confusion.

Prophecies swarmed through her head each time the sun went down, but Mintleaf couldn't bring herself to listen to them properly. It was scary, and it was not how the tortoiseshell she-cat had imagined life as a medicine cat. She rarely did any healing these days, and it was if StarClan was punishing her for something she had never done. Most nights she didn't want to sleep, didn't want to go back to the hissing cats whose yowls she could not understand. She heard the prophecies; she knew they were all coming some day. But she couldn't hear them like she should. They didn't make any sense. But she *knew* what they were.

As Mintleaf curled up in her nest, she had a moment to prepare before StarClan grabbed her and hauled her into the dream world.

At first everything was black, and then a blinding light appeared before her. Mintleaf felt confusion bubbling up inside her. This was not the normal dream she'd been having every night. *This one was different.* It was scary, almost, to be dreaming something that didn't involve whispering voices and yowling cats the moment she closed her eyes. It terrified her, yet she felt a small pang of exitement

inside her.

The light slowly faded away into mist and Mintleaf found herself standing in a valley. Her nerves had left her and she smiled; *she smiled*. She'd done nothing but cower in fear in her past dreams. It exhilarated her to finally fall asleep and not be terrified.

Slowly, as if on cue, an ebony-black tom strode out of the mist that graced the atmosphere. He stopped in front of her and the breath caught in Mintleaf's throat. She felt as if she could hardly breath, as if the air was slowly being pushed out of her and it was impossible to take a breath in. But as the shock left her, Mintleaf felt an aching sadness sweep through her body. No, *this could not be happening.*

"Darkwish," the tortoiseshell choked out, her voice laced with grief.

Darkwish — the one cat who truly believed in her. The one cat who understand how important her destiny was, that she *needed* to be medicine cat, whatever it took. Darkwish — *her brother.* Her dead brother who had been brutally murdered by a dog, as if he was nothing but prey. Even though the black tom was just a spirit now, Mintleaf could still see the scar over his throat where the beast had ripped his life away from him.

She remembered ordering Robinflight to lead the dog toward the Thunderpath before it reached the FernClan camp. But little did she know, Darkwish had been patrolling beside the Thunderpath border at that exact time. He'd come back to camp, sticky blood flowing freely from his throat. *And she hadn't been able to save him.* Darkwish's death was her fault. *All her fault.*

"I'm sorry." The words escaped Mintleaf's mouth before she could even think about saying them. "I'm sorry, Darkwish, I'm so, *so sorry*." She threw herself at her brother, violent sobs shaking her whole body as she embraced him.

Darkwish's crystalline gaze lit up with shock, and then he licked his sister's head and drew back. "It is not your fault, Mintleaf. But I come with a warning."

Mintleaf's heart pounded faster. *This was it — the moment her old*

dreams returned. Fear bubbled up inside her, and the medicine cat sunk her claws into the ground and mentally prepared herself for the terror that was about in engulf her.

But nothing happened. She remained in the valley with her dead brother, his leaf-green gaze watching her intently. She felt her nerves calm a little, but her claws did not leave the ground and her heart rate didn't slow. Slowly, the grief and fear inside her was swallowed up by happiness, and Mintleaf didn't feel anything but glad to see her brother again.

"I've missed you," she told him, her tone bursting with pleasure.

"I know you have," Darkwish's voice was laced with a sadness Mintleaf only recognised as one thing; *longing. "*But I have a warning for you."

Anxiety seized Mintleaf once more. "No," she whimpered, taking a step back. "I don't want *any more prophecies.* They've been in my mind more moons now and it's *scary,* Darkwish, it's *scaring me.*"

Darkwish rested his tail tip on Mintleaf's shoulder. "Do not fear, dear sister. This one is different." His eyes closed and his body froze, and for a second Mintleaf was gripped by worry.

She felt as if he had left her, and the aching sadness returned. She choked back a sob and then breathed a sigh of relief as his eyes opened again, his brilliant green eyes that she would do anything to see again.

"Look towards dawn to save your Clan," Darkwish spoke softly, his body stiff and his gaze distant, as if he could see something the medicine cat couldn't. "There is something coming, Mintleaf. A darkness from within your own Clan."

"What does that mean?" the tortoiseshell questioned, her voice desperate. Confusion was building up in her mind. Mintleaf stepped forward, panic gripping her brain, her heart. She searched her brother's crystalline gaze for answers, but his eyes were looking at something far away. *At something she couldn't see*.

"Goodbye, Mintleaf," Darkwish meowed, his voice laced with sadness. "I will see you again soon." He touched his nose to hers and suddenly darkness was rushing into Mintleaf's vision.

It terrified her. Once again, her emotions were overtaken by her fear, and then she realised what was happening: *she was leaving her brother.* Mintleaf cried out as the darkness engulfed Darkwish, his ebony-black body melting easily into the shadows. Grief stabbed at her heart and her own pain threatened to drown her, when suddenly she found herself lying in her torn-up nest.

She had to get back to Darkwish. Frantically she looked around, hoping that she'd see his wonderfully familiar face and feel his fur, his *real fur*, not the spirit kind. When the realisation hit her, Mintleaf felt more alone then ever. *It was just a dream.* The medicine cat curled up close and hid her face with her paws. Her brother had been *right there.* So close, yet so far away. *He's gone, and he's never coming back.*

That was the truth, even if it hurt Mintleaf to believe it.

Slowly, the grief and pain left her, and once again confusion was gathering inside her mind. What was all that about? What did he mean by dawn saving the Clan?

Mintleaf pushed away her confusion and stepped out of the medicine den. The ground was decorated with long shadows as the sun emerged from its nest. Cats were starting to appear at the edge of the clearing, however Mintleaf didn't join them. *The dawn. It's dawn.*

She looked at the rising sun and felt stronger, somehow. Whatever happened, FernClan would be alright. Dawn would save them. Mintleaf squinted and noticed a dark shape in the sky, looking at her — watching her. A bird?

The creature dived down and touched his paws to the ground, transparent ebony-black pelt unnoticeable by the other cats. He stood out from them, even when he wasn't a spirit.

Darkwish. He's here.

It's not real, though.

Mintleaf waited for the strong emotion of grief to attack her again, for her heart to be filled with pain and longing. But nothing happened. Instead, as she watched her brother slowly pad towards her, she felt more determined, somehow. Stronger.

She swore on Darkwish's legacy that dawn would save her Clan, whatever it took.

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Hi everyone!

I've decided to write these notes at the end of some chapters, just to explain some stuff and answer any questions. I hope you're enjoying the story so far!

Have a good day/night!

- Koa <3
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Chapter 1

[image]

Dawn signified a new day, a new beginning. It meant a fresh start, a way to wipe out the past mistakes. It didn't matter if you embarrassed yourself on patrol yesterday — with dawn, came the chance to prove yourself worthy once more.

That's what Dawnpaw told herself she sat and watched the rising sun with her sister, Brightpaw. Their ginger-and-white tabby pelts shone like flame as dawn threw sunlight across the camp. It was a beautiful thing, dawn. Dawnpaw couldn't think of anything prettier in the world than what she was named after. After all, dawn was second chance.

As the other apprentices filtered out of the tunnel that led to their den, they were greeted with the small pile of fresh-kill that the two sisters had brought them. The dust-brown tabby Duskpaw came first, amber eyes falling into slits as he was bathed in sunlight. Next was Silverpaw, her grey tabby pelt neatly groomed like it was each morning.

Duskpaw greeted the youngest apprentices warmly, but Silverpaw just crouched down and began munching on a shrew, not even looking at them. Her tail curled over her back paws and she ate delicately, pure white teeth gleaming even after she tore at a chunk of meat, sending shrew blood flying out of a vein and straight for the second-oldest apprentice.

"Gross!" Duskpaw hissed, jumping backwards as his hind leg was stained red. "Keep that blood to yourself!"

Silverpaw's cerulean eyes fell into slits. "And ruin my pelt? No chance."

"Oh, lighten up, Silve," Brightpaw purred, flicking the oldest warrior apprentice with her tail. "He was just joking!"

Silverpaw rolled her eyes and continued eating, but she angled the shrew so no more blood would fly in anyone's direction.

"So, what are you guys doing today?" Duskpaw asked, his bright orange gaze curious.

"Alderbark had to go on the dawn patrol," Brightpaw explained with a flick of her ear. "He said I could hunt, if I wanted. We're doing battle training later," she added proudly.

"*My* mentor is taking me on the sunhigh patrol with her," Silverpaw boasted. "We're going to check that ReedClan is keeping to themselves!"

Duskpaw shrugged, an elegant rise and fall of his shoulders. "Flowerpetal just told you that to get you exited," he meowed to the silver molly, voice laced with mock boredom. "Patrolling is boring, really."

"Oh yeah?" Silverpaw's eyes fell into slits. "How often does Spidervenom take *you* on patrol?"

Irritation bubbled up inside Dawnpaw. Why did the older molly have to be so arrogant? Why couldn't she just leave things, instead of starting an argument? But then again, arguing with Silverpaw was always fun. Dawnpaw *wanted* to fight with the older apprentice.

She almost *craved* it.

Thankfully, Duskpaw ignored her. "What about you, Daw?"

"Hunting," Dawnpaw told him, eyes half closed. She had lowered herself to the ground to soak up all the sunshine she could before her duties called her into the shade of the forest. The sun had warmed Dawnpaw's pelt and carried all the annoyance out of her, leaving the ginger tabby in a good mood. She wanted to keep out of Silverpaw and Duskpaw's banter, and she suspected that Brightpaw felt the same. The small ginger-and-white molly had stopped the fight, but an uneasy look laced her expression.

"We should all go together," Brightpaw suggested. "It'd be fun. We

haven't hung out as a group in the forest recently."

Silverpaw shot a quizzical look at the medicine den, but when no cat appeared out of the ferns she sighed and batted Brightpaw on the shoulder. "I suppose you meant my brother too?"

Once again Dawnpaw felt a prickle of anger. Silverpaw couldn't care less about Dreampaw, but she always acted like she thought he was the best cat in the world. *Apart from herself, obviously.*

"Of course," Brightpaw deadpanned, but her sage gaze suggested she didn't mean it. "Dreampaw is always welcome to come with us. But he's never here, so..."

It was true; Dreampaw was rarely seen by the others. He was the med cat's apprentice, destined to heal cats and decipher omens from StarClan. He'd chosen a different path to them, one that none of them could relate too. Lately it seemed like the grey tabby wanted nothing to do with them, and Dawnpaw was fine with that. She'd never really met Dreampaw properly — him and Silverpaw were made apprentices not long after the sisters were born.

Silverpaw rolled her eyes. "He's probably *too busy*, anyway," she commented. She finished off her shrew with in a few gulps and trotted towards the entrance tunnel. "I'll be waiting for you at the Twoleg path!" she called over her shoulder with a graceful toss of her silver-striped head.

"She thinks she owns the apprentice den just because Cinderstar is her father," Dawnpaw hissed. She'd been expecting Silverpaw to say some mean remark about her own brother. As per usual, the emotion of annoyance lingered in Dawnpaw even when the silver tabby who had caused it was gone.

"I know, right?" Duskpaw agreed. "I can't *wait* until she becomes a warrior and we don't have to deal with her in our den."

"But then she'll be even *more* insufferable," Brightpaw pointed out, shooting the dust-brown tabby a meaningful look. "She'll try and order us around, and probably act like she's already deputy."

Dawnpaw jumped. "Do you think she'll be deputy someday?" She didn't really believe it, but maybe the current deputy saw good leadership qualities instead of arrogance in her.

"Fat chance," Duskpaw snorted, his voice laced with humour. "But come on, we'd better eat and then go join her before she comes back and yells at us."

The three apprentices tucked into the remaining fresh-kill on their pile, savouring every bite. It was green-leaf, meaning the forest was full of prey, but they wanted to take advantage of the mountain of fresh-kill before the cold paw of leaf-bare grabbed them again.

A dark grey tabby came padding out of the medicine cat's den, blue eyes showing no emotion. He sniffed hopefully around the where the other apprentices were, but there was no prey to be found.

"Sorry, Dreampaw," Brightpaw meowed, voice laced with guilt. "We ate the last of it."

Dreampaw's crystalline gaze flickered for a moment, but Dawnpaw couldn't decipher what it meant. Was he upset that they ate all the food? Or angry at them? The medicine cat apprentice just shrugged and trotted out of the entrance tunnel.

"He didn't even say hi!" Brightpaw burst out as soon as he was gone.

Dawnpaw shrugged. "He only ever really talks to Silverpaw."

"Speaking of Silverpaw," Duskpaw butted in, "she's waiting for us right now."

The three apprentices got to their paws and padded out of camp, chatting among themselves. The forest carried wonderful scents of live prey and different plants into Dawnpaw's nose, exhilarating her. Everything out here was so pretty; emerald-green grass, rich brown tree bark, berry-covered bushes. She picked up Dreampaw's scent leading over to Appletrees, so the ginger-and-white tabby apprentice guessed that he was in search of breakfast.

Sure enough, Silverpaw was waiting for them near the Twoleg path, keeping well away from the perfectly-shaped slab of stone that

curved through the forest like a stream. Her sky-blue gaze glinted with annoyance as they approached.

"Took you long enough," the tabby commented. "I was worried that I'd have to go on patrol soon."

"You were *worried* that you wouldn't get to hang out with *me*?" Dawnpaw joked. Warm yellow eyes met icy blue ones as Silverpaw looked at her, eyes falling into slits. The annoyance in the youngest apprentice had returned, making her claws dig into the ground.

"Not *you* specifically," the molly argued. "More like Duskpaw and Brightpaw. I can't *stand* you."

"Then why invite me?" Dawnpaw challenged, knowing how much she was annoying Silverpaw. *And she loved it.* Fighting with Silverpaw was something Dawnpaw found fun; she hated when Silverpaw was fighting with the others, and arguing with the hot headed molly always left her feeling a prickle of anger, but *she loved it.*

It was thrilling.

Duskpaw barged his way in between the two mollies, amber gaze flashing. "Stop fighting, *seriously*," his tone was pleading.

Dawnpaw shrugged. "She started it." She flicked her tail at Silverpaw, knowing that she was winding her up.

Sure enough, the silver molly's eyes fell into slits and she hissed. "No, I didn't!"

"Oh calm down, Silve," Dawnpaw deadpanned, flicking her denmate with her tail. "I'm only *joking*."

This was her favourite part of fighting with Silverpaw. Usually Duskpaw or Brightpaw would tell them to stop, and the the flame-coloured apprentice would wind her enemy up a little more by blaming her. Then she'd pull the "I'm only joking" card, which made Silverpaw mad as ever.

"Dawnpaw!" her sister hissed. "Stop talking." She paused. "Come

walk with me?"

Dawnpaw shrugged. "Fine."

They left Duskpaw and Silverpaw to hunt by themselves and padded off in the direction of the training hollow. Dawnpaw sniffed hopefully through the undergrowth, but finally she found a mouse oblivious to the fact that the sisters were there.

Carefully she stalked up to the mouse and pounced just as the small creature looked up and sniffed the air. She trapped it between her claws and killed it swiftly with a blow to the neck.

"Nice catch!" Brightpaw yelled, hurrying after her. "Come on, let's go check out Lilypond."

The pair hunted for most of the morning, ending with a small pile of fresh-kill. They seated themselves beside Lilypond, looking down at the rippling water. Dawnpaw felt the nice feeling of calm wash over her — she enjoyed being alone with her sister. Brightpaw was always friendly and understanding, or at least she tried to be.

"Why do you always have to start a fight with Silverpaw?" Brightpaw suddenly questioned. She turned her serious gaze to Dawnpaw.

"What do you mean?" Dawnpaw deadpanned. Gold eyes met sage ones as she narrowed her eyes at her sister.

"You're *always* arguing with her," the ginger-and-white patched molly explained. "And it's mostly *your* fault! You always wind her up and then just laugh like it's hilarious that your friend is mad at you." Her tone was serious.

Dawnpaw felt a prickle of annoyance. "First of all, Silverpaw is definitely *not* my friend," she fired at her sister. "And I didn't even do anything! It was Silverpaw who decided to react to it!"

"But *you're* always the one who winds her up!" Brightpaw argued, her tone strangely flat and emotionless. "Don't get me wrong, I understand that she's annoying and all, but maybe she'd be nicer if you just left her alone!"

"You're supposed to be on my side!" Dawnpaw burst out, anger rising up inside her. Why couldn't her sister understand her?

"Daw, I love you and everything —"

"Don't start with that rubbish!" Dawnpaw snarled before Brightpaw could finish her sentence. "I'm going to get some fresh air." She turned and stalked away, pelt prickling.

Anger fluttered around inside her like butterflies. Why didn't her sister get where she was coming from? Silverpaw was the most annoying, rude and arrogant cat she'd ever met. And sure; she found it *fun* to wind up the silver molly like that. But so what? Was it really that big of a deal? Arguing with Silverpaw was always one of the things Dawnpaw looked forward to each morning.

Dawnpaw trudged through the forest, her paws taking her towards Appletrees. She considered looking for Dreampaw, but it was hard to speak to the grey tabby apprentice, and besides, she'd basically just had an argument with his sister. *But she hadn't cause it, no matter what Brightpaw said.*

A calmness seemed to wash over Dawnpaw as she padded through the trees. Bright red or green apples graced the branches and decorated the floor, and a strong apple-scent hung in the air. Brightpaw was being ridiculous; Dawnpaw was only standing up for herself. Was there anything bad about that?

No, the ginger-and-white apprentice decided as she sat down to rest beside one of the larger trees. *No, there's nothing bad about that at all.*

~ ~~

Hi everyone!

First official chapter out! Yay! Honestly, I'm super exited about this project and where it will lead. I've been planning it for months and I think I've made some good characters that you can all empathise with — let me know if you agree!

So the first few chapters are mainly to introduce the characters and their personalities, and show normal Clan life, but the

main plot starts up at around Chapter 4/5, don't worry! Once again, any polite feedback is apprenticed and I will take it into consideration <3.

Have a good day/night!

- Koa <3

Chapter 2

[image]

"Alright, this is called the front paw blow. Watch carefully."

Dawnpaw watched intently as her mentor swiped out with her front paw, claws outstretched. She noticed how Foxclaw reached her arm out as far as it would go and darted backwards quickly so her imaginary enemy couldn't strike back immediately. She carefully memorised the little details of the move in her mind — she wanted to get this perfectly correct.

"Now you try," Foxclaw ordered, sitting down beside Alderbark.

Dawnpaw focused for a moment, imagining there was an enemy warrior in front of her. She thought about how she would make the move, where her claws would scratch the invisible cat. Then she reached forward, stretching out her paw as far as possible and swiping at her imaginary enemy. Then she retracted her claws and darted backwards.

Foxclaw's expression was laced with disbelief. "Wow!" her tone was proud. "That was really good, Dawnpaw!"

"Was that your first try?" Alderbark quizzed. Dawnpaw nodded shyly, causing the dark ginger tabby to replace his surprised face with an impressed expression.

Dawnpaw felt a trickle of happiness run through her. Both mentors thought she was a good fighter! She felt like if they'd just said "good job" like they usually did, the small molly would be left unsure if she really did get the move right. Dawnpaw tended to overthink her training; if she wasn't congratulated, she had to try harder. She loved praise — she needed it.

She craved it.

Brightpaw stalked over to stand in front of her mentor. "Can I try it too?"

Dawnpaw had made up with her sister after their argument; last night, she'd brought Brightpaw a rabbit to share. The two had bonded again after talking about what had happened, and now the pair were almost always together.

"Go ahead," Alderbark agreed.

Dawnpaw's sister crouched down a tail-length away from the others and focused. Her sage eyes were pinned onto someone nobody could see but her. Then, quick as a snake, Brightpaw lunged forward in a blurr of white-and-ginger and reached her paw out to swipe at an imaginary warrior. But her hind leg got caught on a stray root and she fell face-first onto the sandy dirt with an "oof".

Alderbark was nodding thoughtfully. "I think you would have aced that move if you hadn't tripped," he commented.

Brightpaw hissed as she sat up, irritation flashing in her gaze. "Let me try again."

"No, I have another move to show you," her mentor meowed hurriedly. "A less complex move where you won't trip."

"What?!" Brightpaw exclaimed, eyes wide. "But if I could just try again, I *will* get it!"

Dawnpaw stood up to defend her sister, but Foxclaw shot her a warning look.

"No," Alderbark cut her off. "Come on, I'll show you both how to leap onto your enemy's back and *stay on*." He paused. "Foxclaw, be the enemy."

Both apprentices watched with interest as the dark ginger tabby crouched down with Foxclaw facing him. Alderbark then pushed off his hind legs and leapt up onto the calico's back, digging his toes in but keeping his claws sheathed. Foxclaw whirled around, trying to shake him off, but Alderbark stayed firmly on her back. He mimed raking his claws down her sides and then released his grip so he

could jump off before she threw him.

Dawnpaw memorised where Alderbark stood exactly, so he could get a better grip. She also noticed how he seemed to balance himself before raking Foxclaw's sides.

"Now you to try," the calico ordered. "First Dawnpaw try on Brightpaw, then the other way round."

The two apprentices faced each other. Dawnpaw crouched down as her eyes fell into slits. She calculated where her sister was, and how she would get onto her back. Then she pushed off her back legs and leapt onto Brightpaw's back, digging her toes in but hiding her claws like Alderbark had done. Brightpaw jumped around, trying to shake her sister loose, but Dawnpaw gripped the ginger-and-white molly's back and stayed on. She balanced herself, like Alderbark had done, then raked her toes down Brightpaw's sides.

"Good job, Dawnpaw!" Foxclaw called. "Now jump off before she throws you!"

Dawnpaw could feel her sister preparing to throw her off, but she pushed of Brightpaw's back and shoved her away. She landed neatly on her paws a tail-length away, while Brightpaw was knocked over.

"Well done, Dawnpaw!" Foxclaw grinned, and Dawnpaw's chest glowed with happiness. She need praise. She needed to know that she'd done the right thing.

"Your turn, Brightpaw," Alderbark instructed.

Brightpaw copied what her sister had done, landing on her back, but she overbalanced when she tried to rake Dawnpaw's sides and landed with a *thump* on the ground.

Alderbark was shaking his head. "You need to stop and wait before you continue the move!"

"But in a battle, there's no *time* to stop and wait!" Brightpaw protested.

"Try again," Alderbark told her, choosing to ignore her comment.

"And this time, balance yourself before raking Dawnpaw's sides."

The two apprentices faced each other again. Once Brightpaw was on Dawnpaw's back, her sister shifted her weight around for a heartbeat before raking her sheathed claws down Dawnpaw's sides. She completed the move by leaping of her back and landing neatly on the ground.

Alderbark purred. "Good job, Brightpaw!"

Brightpaw's green gaze glowed even brighter. Dawnpaw strode over and congratulated her sister, purring happily.

"Alright," Foxclaw announced, voice laced with pride. "I think we're done for the day."

"What?" Yellow eyes met jade ones as Dawnpaw looked up her mentor. "But we're barely even started!"

"It's past sunhigh," Alderbark pointed out, a trickle of annoyance creeping into his tone. He exchanged a glance with the calico molly beside him.

Foxclaw looked uneasy. "We *were* going to do this tomorrow, but since you're so eager..."

"It's time for your hunting assessment," her brother announced.

Dawnpaw felt a burst of exitement inside her. Her assessment! She hadn't been expecting it until after Silverpaw and Dreampaw had gotten their full names. After all, in FernClan it was a test for if one was worthy to become a warrior. Dawnpaw knew that the other Clans did the apprentice training differently.

But this was her chance to prove herself worthy of FernClan. She would bring back the most prey. She had to.

Beside her, Brightpaw was grinning. "Really? When do we start?"

"You can start now," Foxclaw informed them. "Be back before sunset. And catch as much prey as possible. We'll both be secretly watching you."

Dawnpaw's paws itched to dash off into the forest, but she stayed still as Alderbark continued with the instructions.

"Brightpaw, you'll go hunt at Appletrees," the dark ginger tom was saying. "And Dawnpaw, you can go along the stream to Lilypond. Off you go!"

Dawnpaw leapt to her paws and sprinted across the clearing towards the stream. The pretty silver water cut through most of FernClan's territory, and plenty of prey stuck close to it because of the water. The ginger-and-white apprentice crouched down and crawled through the undergrowth. It wasn't long before she spotted a wood mouse nibbling on a nut not far from the stream. It hadn't noticed her. *Yet.*

Carefully, Dawnpaw stalked it, keeping her tail slightly raised off the ground, like Foxclaw had taught her. Her ears stayed flat and she kept her mouth open, and her gaze didn't waver from the mouse.

She paused when she was a tail-length from it, then pushed off her hind legs and trapped the mouse between her paws, killing it with a quick bite to the neck. Satisfied, the young molly buried her kill and set off along the stream again. Almost immediately, a rabbit stepped out of a bush and raced away, Dawnpaw haring after it.

After killing the rabbit, the ginger-and-white tabby continued creeping along the stream, keeping her senses alert for the tiniest of movements. As she crept closer to Lilypond, and therefore closer to Twolegplace, she heard a strange sound coming from ahead.

Lilypond was just visible through the trees. Even though Dawnpaw couldn't see Twolegplace from here, she knew it was there. But what was the noise? *It sounded like someone walking.* Cautiously, she padded forwards through the undergrowth, keeping herself low against the ground. Whatever it was, it clearly wasn't trying to stay quiet. Rustling travelled into her ears and followed by hissing and a crash, and Dawnpaw imagined the stranger getting caught in some brambles.

She walked past Lilypond and closer to Twolegplace, fully aware

that she was nearing dangerous territory. *There!* A grey tabby kittypet was wandering further into the forest. Dawnpaw could just see glimpses of Twoleg nests beyond the trees.

The kittypet sniffed the air but seemed oblivious to the fact that the apprentice was there. Dawnpaw's eyes fell into slits. *There was an intruder on her territory.* She already knew that Foxclaw was watching her. What better way to prove herself than defend her Clan's land? And Foxclaw would *praise* her. Slowly, Dawnpaw crept closer to the kittypet. The storm-grey tabby was sniffing at a holly bush — she didn't look up as Dawnpaw neared closer.

The ginger-and-white apprentice leapt suddenly, exploding out of the undergrowth and onto the kittypet's back. The tabby shrieked and tried to throw the Clan cat off, but she was weak and Dawnpaw had learnt this move earlier that day.

"What are you doing in FernClan territory?" the ginger molly snarled into the kittypet's ear.

"Let me go!" the other cat cried back, voice laced with fear. "I promise I'll go home and never come back!"

Dawnpaw dug her claws into her shoulder, causing the kittypet to screech in pain. The sound filled Dawnpaw's ears and overwhelmed her, filling her mind with screaming cats and splatters of blood. *It was too much.* With a gasp, the apprentice let go of the kittypet's body and rolled to the ground. The grey tabby cast one last terrified look at her and raced back to Twolegplace, blood dripping down her shoulders and staining the ground.

"Don't come back!" Dawnpaw yelled after her, but her voice wobbled slightly. "Just get back to hunting," she mumbled to herself.

She stood up shakily and walked along the path back to Lilypond, catching a thrush as it tried to flap away. But she couldn't get the screaming out of her mind. *She did what she needed to do...that kittypet would be fine.* It was just a kittypet; why did Dawnpaw care so much that she made it bleed?

By the time the sun was just beginning to set, the tabby had collected a large amount of prey. She returned to the training hollow with her rabbit and a vole between her jaws. Above her, the setting sun was sending rays of red and gold across the sky, turning her pelt to flame. *She couldn't help but think that dawn was much prettier.*

Dusk signified the end of something, the end of the day. Dawn was a knew beginning, a second chance. That was what was so beautiful about it.

Foxclaw and Alderbark were waiting for her, sitting side by side.

"You did well," the calico molly greeted her. "You can take it back to camp — I'll go collect the rest of it. You must be exhausted!"

Dawnpaw nodded, her paws suddenly feeling as heavy as stones. She quickly carried her prey back to camp and dumped it on the fresh-kill pile. Sunflower, Greenwillow and Flowerpetal were resting nearby, chatting, but Dawnpaw's mother looked up as she approached.

"Well done!" Sunflower purred. "That'll feed the Clan for sure. I'm proud of you!"

Dawnpaw felt a smile creep onto her face. "It was our hunting assessment today."

"I bet you did great," Sunflower meowed, and her friends nodded in agreement.

She pressed her cheek to her mother's and padded into the apprentice's den. She circled around in her nest to flatten it and then curled up.

Sleep grabbed her and hauled her into darkness almost as soon as she closed her eyes.

~ ~~

Hi everyone!

Just in case you couldn't tell, Foxclaw and Alderbark are siblings. In the canon Warriors series, the warriors don't really seem to have siblings, so I decided to change that.

Have a good day/night!

- Koa <3

Chapter 3

[image]

"It's *so* unfair."

The irritated remark came from Silverpaw, her eyes focused on the ground. Dawnpaw threw the mouse bones aside and glanced over at Mintleaf's den. The silver tabby beside her continued complaining, not even touching her thrush.

"I mean, it doesn't even make sense," she mused. "I get that he's a medicine cat and all. But why does he get special privileges and we don't?"

"Great StarClan, Silve," Duskpaw piped up. "Dreampaw is just getting his full name! That's not *special privileges*."

"You're overreacting," Dawnpaw added, earning a glare from the silver tabby.

"I'm not *overreacting*!" Silverpaw hissed. "I'm just annoyed that my brother gets his name before I do!"

"You'll get your warrior name soon," another voice spoke. The apprentices all turned to see Spidervenom standing beside them, black pelt gleaming. "Dreampaw will continue his training — just because he's earned his name doesn't mean he'll stop learning from Mintleaf!"

"But it's not *fair*," Silverpaw whined, seemingly oblivious to the fact that she was talking to a senior warrior. "I still have moons before I become a warrior!"

"Shut up, Silverpaw!" Dawnpaw meowed fiercely. "It's not that big of a deal." It was though, but she wouldn't show it.

Spidervenom flicked her with his tail before turning back to the

oldest apprentice. "Dreampaw has worked hard for this. He's *earned* his full name. Don't be rude just because he gets his name before you do!"

Silverpaw looked down at her paws. "Fine. Sorry, Spidervenom."

Dawnpaw almost rolled her eyes. As if Silverpaw was sorry about anything! It was obvious that the hot-headed molly was just pretending.

But Spidervenom seemed to accept her apology. "Alright. Duskpaw, we're doing some hunting first thing tomorrow." He glanced up at the darkening sky. "Mintleaf and Dreampaw should be coming soon. And you four should eat. Remember, it's the Gathering tonight, and we don't know who will be chosen." He padded away towards the fresh-kill pile.

"Oh my gosh!" Silverpaw's cerulean gaze lit up. "The Gathering! I totally forgot! I hope *I'm* going!"

"I don't," Dawnpaw meowed calmly. "With you there, I won't be able to enjoy myself."

Silverpaw's eyes fell into slits. "That's why *I* hope that *you're* not going!"

"Stop fighting!" Brightpaw pushed her was between the squabbling mollies. "Look, Mintleaf and Dreampaw are coming now!"

Yellow eyes met cerulean ones as Dawnpaw looked up at the medicine den. Dreampaw was gazing at her, pride shining in his eyes. *He was so smug about getting his full name.* She felt like clawing that look off his face.

Beside her, Silverpaw was practically growling in anger. "This is *so* unfair!"

"Cats of FernClan, gather beneath the Boulder to welcome our new medicine cat into the Clan!" Cinderstar's meow rang out across the clearing. He was seated upon the Boulder at the end of camp. Beside him sat Mintleaf, and on a smaller rock to the left of them the deputy, Paleglow, was licking her chest. Dawnpaw noticed now

small and frail Paleglow looked. Surely she should move to the elder's den soon?

As the four apprentices chose spots near the back of the gathered cats, Dreampaw was brought to the front of the crowd.

"StarClan," Cinderstar began, calling the words out to the sky. "Dreampaw has trained for many moons, learning the ways of healing. Now he asks for his full name and the title of medicine cat."

"He's only been training for *five* moons," Silverpaw hissed under her breath. Dawnpaw shot her a glare.

Deerhoof silenced her with a flick of his tail. "Hush!"

"Dreampaw, step forward," Mintleaf ordered. The oldest apprentice stepped forward, cerulean gaze shining with pride. Mintleaf gazed down at him. "From this moment onwards, you will be known as Dreamhaunt. StarClan honours your dedication to healing and desire to help your Clan."

Dreamhaunt dipped his head to her. "I am thankful."

Mintleaf leapt off the Boulder and licked her old apprentice between the ears, murmuring something Dawnpaw couldn't hear. *Silverpaw was right — this was unfair.* She longed to get her warrior name.

"Paleglow has asked to move to the elder's den," Cinderstar was announcing. "I have accepted her decision, and I thank her for the many moons she spend serving her Clan. Paleglow, you would have made a great leader."

Paleglow dipped her head to the dark tom. "Thank you, Cinderstar."

"Paleglow! Paleglow! Paleglow!" The chanting escaped from the Clan's mouths and lifted off into the treetops, and Dawnpaw wondered if the other Clans could hear them.

"I say these words by Paleglow's side, so that she and StarClan can hear and approve my choice," Cinderstar meowed as soon as the

voices had died down. "Dimlight will be the new deputy of FernClan."

Dimlight looked up in surprise. He sat up taller and nodded to all three cats on the Boulder. "Thank you, Cinderstar. I am honoured. I promise that I strive to be the kind of deputy Paleglow was."

"Dimlight! Dimlight! Dimlight!" the Clan began chanting once more. Dawnpaw called the new deputy's name to the darkening sky until she felt as if her voice would be gone.

"That was unexpected," Brightpaw murmured to her. "I mean, I was expecting Paleglow to move to the elder's den, but I didn't think it would be this soon. But I respect Dimlight."

"He'll make a good deputy," Dawnpaw agreed.

The Clan began to get to their paws and wander off. The ginger-and-white molly was just standing up when Cinderstar made another announcement.

"Wait! I need to call the cats for the Gathering!"

Dawnpaw sat back down again, ears pricked. She'd only been to the Gathering once before, with Brightpaw and Duskpaw. Maybe she'd get to go again?

"As usual, I will go, along with our new deputy, Dimlight," the FernClan leader was saying, dark grey tabby pelt shining gold in the darkening sky. "Mintleaf and Dreamhaunt, it is time to start your journey to StarClan's Cavern." He nodded at the two medicine cats. Mintleaf and Dreamhaunt shared a glance before dipping their heads to Cinderstar and hurrying out of camp.

"I hope I'm going!" Silverpaw meowed exitedly to Duskpaw.

"I hope you're *not."* Dawnpaw grinned at her. Silverpaw just hissed.

"Hush! Your leader is speaking!" Appleseed snapped at them.

"Elders Halfleg and Paleglow will go," Cinderstar went on. "Robinflight, Foxclaw, Flowerpetal, Honeybee, Daisystem and

Deerhoof, you will be our warrior party. As for the apprentices; Silverpaw and Dawnpaw will go."

Happiness surged through Dawnpaw's veins. She was going to the Gathering! Then it hit her. Brightpaw's name hadn't been mentioned. She turned to her sister, guilt quickly mixing with joy.

"Have fun," Brightpaw deadpanned, her sage gaze full of jealousy. "Tell me about it when you get home." She turned and stalked off to the apprentice's den.

"I bet you'll come next moon!" Dawnpaw called after her, but her sister was already disappearing into the tunnel. *Was Brightpaw mad at her? Or upset?*

Duskpaw bumped Dawnpaw's shoulder. "Tell me all about it when you get back!"

"Of course!" Dawnpaw tried to smile at him, but Brightpaw's jealous aura kept flicking through her mind.

Silverpaw was scowling. "*You're* coming too. *Great*." Her voice was laced with annoyance.

Foxclaw approached them. "You three better eat before we go."

"Yes, Foxclaw," Dawnpaw meowed to her mentor. She pushed any thoughts of Brightpaw out of her mind. She was going to the Gathering tonight!

~ ~~

Hi everyone!

I know the chapter is short, but I wanted to save the Gathering for the next chapter. I hope you're enjoying the story so far!

And in case you didn't already know: Dawnpaw and Brightpaw are sisters. Silverpaw and Dreamhaunt are siblings and Duskpaw is an only child. Also, Foxclaw and Alderbark are siblings!

Have a good day/night!

- Koa ＜3

Chapter 4

[image]

At FernClan's camp, noise had never really been an issue. There was only a limited amount of noise the cats could make in their own territory; an invisible force seemed to keep the volume at a certain level. The Gathering, however, seemed to have broken the limits of noise and used high volume as of to make a point.

Dawnpaw crouched many fox-lengths away from the Gathering hollow, her pelt brushing against Foxclaw's. Cinderstar stood at the head of the group, cerulean gaze watching the other Clans below them. *What was he waiting for?*

Dimlight stood on one side of him; Robinflight on the other. Behind then, shuffling their paws impatiently, was the rest of the patrol; Flowerpetal, Honeybee, Daisystem, Deerhoof, Halfleg and Paleglow. The two apprentices stuck to the edge of the cats, Dawnpaw choosing to stay near her mentor's side. The noise of many cats sharing words at the Gathering lifted into the air and forced its way into Dawnpaw's ears — it was almost overwhelming, if not for the exitement that rushed through her veins.

"Remember not to give any information away," Foxclaw hissed at them. "If anyone asks, FernClan is thriving."

"Of course!" Dawnpaw meowed back. "I probably won't talk to anyone anyway."

The ginger molly gave her an amused look. "Like last time? I practically had to drag you away from that HeatherClan apprentice!"

Dawnpaw shook her head. "He was chatty!"

Silverpaw was hopping from paw to paw. "How long is Cinderstar going to take?"

"Hush!" Flowerpetal flicked her apprentice's ear with her white-tipped tail. "He'll lead us down when he's ready."

Silverpaw rolled her eyes. "He's taking his time for sure," she muttered under her breath, but the words still managed to travel into Dawnpaw's ears, however the molly chose not to react.

As the dark tabby leading the patrol raised his tail and began to pad down into the hollow, Dawnpaw mentally prepared herself for the explosion of noise that was about to surround her. Voices of many cats whisked into her ears as she entered the hollow, head held high. She stuck close to Foxclaw's side as the cats began to filter away, weaving through the other Clans and sharing warm words of greeting.

"Why don't you go join the other apprentices?" Foxclaw suggested. They had seated themselves at the edge of the Gathering, but Dawnpaw noticed how her mentor was eyeing a group of warriors like she wanted to chat with them.

"Alright," the ginger-and-white molly agreed. *She wished that Brightpaw was there to keep her company.* Then she wouldn't be stuck with just Silverpaw.

Dawnpaw left her mentor and joined the circle of apprentices, choosing a spot between Silverpaw and Skypaw from HeatherClan, whom she'd been talking to last Gathering.

"Hi," the FernClan molly greeted him.

Skypaw grinned at her. "You came! I didn't see you and thought you had stayed behind. Where's your sister and Duskpaw?"

"Not coming tonight," Dawnpaw told him.

One of the ReedClan apprentices were boasting about their fight with a fox. "I leapt onto its back, and shredded the stupid creature's ear until there was nothing but mangled skin and fur!"

The pale grey molly beside Skypaw was watching, yellow gaze lit up with awe. "I wish I was that brave!" she breathed.

"I'm the bravest cat in ReedClan!" the tom grinned at her.

"This is my sister, Moonpaw," the grey tom Dawnpaw had befriended whispered to her. "I think she totally has a crush on Ripplepaw — the ReedClan tom. He thinks he's StarClan's gift to the forest. The one beside him is Owlpaw and beside your Clanmate is Peachpaw, from my Clan. She's really anxious about Gatherings. I don't know the others."

"Okay," Dawnpaw answered him. She processes Skypaw's words and jumped. "But cats from different Clan's can't be together!" *It was against the warrior code.*

Skypaw purred, his gaze full of amusement. "Not like that! My sister just thinks Ripplepaw is the best apprentice ever — I was just joking."

"Cats of all Clans! The Gathering is starting!"

The call came from Otterstar of ReedClan as he leapt onto the Half-Tree. The other two leaders followed until they were arranged comfortably upon the tree stump. Otterstar dipped his head to Breezestar, signally for the HeatherClan leader to begin.

"The moorlands have been blessed with prey this green-leaf," the pale brown molly declared. "And two of our queens have kitted. A fox has recently been chased off our land." She stepped back and glanced at Cinderstar. "I think it crossed the border in your forest, Cinderstar. That is all we have to report."

FernClan's leader stepped forward. "FernClan is also thriving. Our bellies are full and there should be new apprentices by the next Gathering. Breezestar, thank you for your warning."

Otterstar took his place. "With green-leaf, Twolegs have come and began fishing in our river." He glanced at Cinderstar. "They're polluting the water with their rubbish and poisoning the fish. Cinderstar, we ask that you give us Lilypond."

A shocked silence rippled through the Clans. *Otterstar couldn't ask for another Clan's territory.* It was against the warrior code — wasn't

it?

Silverpaw let out a gasp. "He can't do that!"

"Never!" Flowerpetal piped up from across the clearing.

"Lilypond belongs to FernClan!" the call came from Daisystem this time, from where she was seated beside her sister Honeybee.

"Silence!" Cinderstar yowled. "It is not a warrior's place to speak at a Gathering unless asked to!"

"But that mangy fish-breath is trying to steal out territory!" Halfleg protested. Dawnpaw silently agreed with him.

"Enough!" Otterstar's fierce meow rang out across the clearing. "My Clan needs fish. The forest section of our territory is not big enough to support us...I will remind you, Cinderstar, that this happens almost every leaf-bare. Would you really allow another Clan to starve?"

Tension crackled in the air between the two toms. Otterstar's leaf-green gaze was calm and stubborn, and Cinderstar's neck fur was bristling slightly. *What would StarClan think if there was a battle between the Clans right now?* Dawnpaw dug her claws into the soil below her.

"Your Clan has survived countless seasons in that same territory," Cinderstar finally spoke. "Why wouldn't it support you now? I think it's clear that Lilypond belongs to FernClan, as it has for moons. Our ancestors chose that as FernClan territory. Are you saying that you doubt their decision?"

Otterstar's eyes fell into slits as he gazed at the grey tabby before him. "No," he deadpanned. "But just you wait, *Cinder*. Lilypond will belong to ReedClan by next moon." With those words lingering the air around them, Otterstar stepped backwards and scanned the other two leaders.

Dawnpaw bit back a gasp. Otterstar hadn't even used her leader's full name — instead, only the first half had made its way out of his mouth. It was considered informal to call someone by only their

prefix; disrespectful, even. Nicknames were accepted among denmates and friends, but leaders should always act respectful towards other leaders.

Now that the leaders had finished speaking, the Clans began talking to each other once more, but an eerie tension hung in the air around them. Dawnpaw tried to speak with Skypaw again, but the young tom's voice was laced with awkwardness as he attempted to reassure her that Otterstar wouldn't actually do anything drastic.

Eventually Moonpaw left Ripplepaw's side and strutted over to sit beside her brother, who welcomed her with the affection that Dawnpaw yearned from her own littermate. Brightpaw was probably asleep right now, back at camp.

The three apprentices chatted to each other until Cinderstar called his Clan to him. Reluctantly, Dawnpaw meowed her goodbyes to the HeatherClan siblings and once again attached herself to Foxclaw's side. Whether the molly minded or not, she didn't show it.

Once back at camp, the tension that gripped the air around the cats seemed to loosen a little. Mintleaf and the newly named Dreamhaunt were back from StarClan's Cavern, and they padded out of the medicine den to greet the warriors. Silverpaw stuck her tail in the air and walked straight past her brother when Dreamhaunt tried to welcome to her back.

Duskpaw was wide awake when Dawnpaw and Silverpaw pushed their way into the den. Even though her tail was drooping and her paws ached, Dawnpaw sat down in her nest and told the dust-coloured tom everything that had happened, while Silverpaw filled in the gaps and made the occasionally snide remark at the younger molly's story-telling abilities.

"Otterstar can't do that!" Duskpaw had gasped when he was told of the ReedClan leader's outrageous demand.

"He'll try to." Silverpaw shrugged, an elegant rise and fall of her silver-striped shoulders.

While the pair continued talking, Dawnpaw turned to the one cat who hadn't woken up to hear about the Gathering. Brightpaw was curled up tightly in her nest next to her sister's, eyes firmly shut and tail tucked under her head.

Even though the ginger-and-white molly appeared to be sleeping, Dawnpaw could clearly see that Brightpaw was awake. A stab of hurt poked her chest. *Didn't her sister want to welcome her back?* Of course, Brightpaw would hear all about the Gathering in the morning — unless she was listening now. But why didn't she even want to say hi to her littermate?

Sighing, Dawnpaw curled up in her nest. She gently closed her eyes, curling her tail around her body to help keep her warm. The distinct noises of her denmates getting into their nests, too, filled her ears until tiredness caught up with her and sleep overcame her.

~ ~~

Hi everyone!

I hope you're enjoying the story so far! Sorry for the long chapter, but there was a lot of things that needed to happen.

Sorry for not publishing in the past few weeks — I had assessments to hand in for school and tests to study for. It's been a stressful month, but it's almost the school holidays so I'll have more time to write this then!

Have a good day/night!

- Koa <3

Chapter 5

[image]

The next day, Dawnpaw woke to the sound of a cat scrambling down the tunnel of the apprentices's den.

She jumped to her paws as a black tom stuck his head into the den, blocking a majority of the light that was filtering in through the hanging lichen. Dawnpaw spotted the amber eyes and distinctive white front paw and immediately noticed Duskpaw's mentor.

"Can you wake Duskpaw for me?" Spidervenom asked. He thought for a moment. "In second thought, wake them all up and meet me at the training hollow." With those words, he dissapeared and Dawnpaw heard him scramble his way back up to the surface.

The ginger-and-white molly dipped her head and turned to shake her denmates awake. Duskpaw was first to stir, sitting up and stretching dramatically before nodding to Dawnpaw and pushing his way out of the den. Silverpaw was already half awake, soaking up the little amount of sunshine in her nest. The older molly hissed when Dawnpaw prodded her, but she didn't protest when Spidervenom's message was passed on.

"I'm getting breakfast first," Silverpaw declared, pushing past Dawnpaw to get out of the den.

The only cat left in there now was her sister. Brightpaw was spread out in her nest, paws twitching and face twisted into an angry expression. *She was dreaming.* Dawnpaw jabbed her sister in the side, jumping backwards as the ginger-and-white patched molly before her rolled over and sprung to her paws, claws stretched out.

"Watch it!" Dawnpaw hissed to her sister.

Brightpaw blinked and looked around. Dawnpaw passed on Spidervenom's message, deciding to leave her littermate to stretch

and instead go search for breakfast.

Duskpaw and Silverpaw were already sharing a rabbit just outside the den, and the wonderful scent of fresh-kill made its way into Dawnpaw's nose, making her stomach rumble. She chose a mouse off the fresh-kill pile and joined them. Brightpaw soon appeared out of the den and settled down beside Dawnpaw with a thrush. The two sister's ginger-and-white pelts blended together as they leaned into eachother, and Dawnpaw felt a twinge of happiness. Brightpaw wasn't mad at her. *Or at least she hoped so.*

"So, we're all training together this morning?" Silverpaw asked, breaking the somewhat comfortable silence. She threw a dark look at Dawnpaw. "Can't say I'm exited."

"Believe me, the feeling is mutual," Dawnpaw snapped back, eyes falling into slits.

"Can we not fight right now?" Brightpaw pleaded, and the urgent tone that laced her sister's voice forced Dawnpaw to do as she requested.

The four of them finished off their meals and headed for the entrance tunnel, chatting while Silverpaw stalking ahead. They nearly collided with the dark grey tabby who was just heading back into camp. The strong scent of herbs hung heavily in the air around them.

"Dreamhaunt!" Silverpaw cried. "What are you doing here?" She appeared to have forgotten that she was jealous that her brother got his name before her.

"Collecting herbs," the medicine cat apprentice told them. "Um, where are you four going?"

"Training," Dawnpaw told him, kneading the ground impatiently. Their mentors were waiting for them!

There was a spark of something in Dreamhaunt's eyes; Dawnpaw thought for a moment before she realised what it was. *Jealousy.* Was the tabby tom really jealous of them?

"Okay, bye then," Silverpaw's brother deadpanned, gathering the herbs in his jaw again. He trotted away, ears flat.

Silverpaw tossed her head and continued leading them out of camp and along the path to the training hollow. Dawnpaw pushed the thoughts of Dreamhaunt being jealous our of her mind when she saw the four warriors waiting for them.

"Finally," Foxclaw sighed. She flicked her tail at the other mentors. "So, how are we going to do this?"

"Hunting," Spidervenom decided. His amber gaze met four pairs of eyes as he looked back at the apprentices. "You will practice group hunting today."

Dawnpaw shuffled her paws in exitement. They hadn't done group hunting before! Sure, they had gone hunting in a group, but they hadn't been working together.

Silverpaw's mentor stepped forward. "We will teach you the technique of group hunting," Flowerpetal informed them. "and then you can go to Appletrees to practice it."

"I will act the prey," Alderbark offered, and the four mentors moved to their positions.

"You will all spread out across the area," Spidervenom began. "But do not stray to far from your target." He nodded at Alderbark, who was pretending to be looking for nuts and berries.

Brightpaw purred at the sight of her mentor pretending to be a mouse. Dawnpaw had to admit it was a funny thing to watch.

"One of you will stalk the mouse," Foxclaw meowed. She began to creep closer to Alderbark, indicating that she had taken that role. The other two mentors moved with her, but they remained a little behind.

"Make sure you block all the exits," Spidervenom piped up. "You don't want you prey getting away."

Dawnpaw made sure to mentally note the way Spidervenom and

Flowerpetal positioned themselves so they could easily dart forward and grab the mouse if it tried to get away.

Foxclaw suddenly pounced onto the area beside her brother, which caused Alderbark to run straight into Spidervenom, who mock-pinned him down.

"Don't jump on your prey," Foxclaw mentioned to the apprentices. "Land beside it, and then it can run into another cat."

"This technique allows you to bond with your Clanmates and also catch more prey at once," Alderbark added. "But you lot won't practice catching multiple prey at once until later."

Flowerpetal called the apprentices closer with a flick of her tail. "Now it's your turn — go to Appletrees and try to catch as much as possible by trying the group hunting technique."

"And practice some normal hunting while you're at it!" Spidervenom decided. "We don't want your skills to weaken."

The four apprentices quickly hurried away to Appletrees, with Silverpaw once more in the lead. Dawnpaw was too exited to even argue with her, and the silver molly seemed to feel the same way. They were finally doing group hunting! She'd seen warriors to it before, but only the more mature apprentices were allowed to learn it. Generally the younger ones would prefer to do everything by themselves.

They reached Appletrees and that's when Dawnpaw noticed the scratch on her sister's leg. It definitely hadn't been there yesterday. But how did Brightpaw get it? It wasn't like there had been any fighting recently. *Maybe she was clawed by a bird.*

"Are you okay?" Dawnpaw questioned to her sister, nodding at the scratch on Brightpaw's hind leg.

The patched ginger-and-white molly nodded, her face suddenly expressionless. "Yeah."

"Where did you get that?" she asked, concern lacing her voice.

"I don't know!" Brightpaw burst out. "Maybe I rolled over a thorn in my nest?" Her sage eyes fell into slits as she gazed Dawnpaw.

Taken aback by her littermate's reaction, the young apprentice shrugged, then turned to follow Silverpaw and Duskpaw into the trees. The scent of apple flowed swiftly through the atmosphere, and the sound of pawsteps behind her indicated that Brightpaw was following them. The scratch on her sister's leg was still bothering Dawnpaw, but it probably was just a thorn in her nest, like Brightpaw had said.

The huge apple tree that loomed above them welcomed them to Appletrees, along with the stronger scent of apples that laced the air. The four apprentices crept along the ground in search of prey, ears pricked and noses twitching. Dawnpaw soon noticed a mouse, distracted by the nut in its paws. She flicked her tail to gather the others, and, remembering what their mentors had taught them, they spread out to block all the exits. The mouse still hadn't noticed them.

Slowly, Dawnpaw began to creep forward, keeping her pawsteps light. Just as the mouse looked up, she pounced, landing right next to the small creature and sending it racing straight into Duskpaw's outstretched claws. The dust-brown tabby threw the mouse in the air and it landed with a *thump* on the ground, stunned. Silverpaw darted forward and blood splattered the ground as she slit the mouse's throat.

"Great job, Silverpaw!" Duskpaw grinned.

The silver molly tossed her head. "Of course. I'm the best hunter here."

Dawnpaw rolled her eyes. "Whatever you say, Silve."

They continued group hunting until they'd caught a couple of mice and a rabbit, and remembered their mentors's request for them to practice regular hunting. They all disappeared into seperate sections of Appletrees.

Now she was alone, Dawnpaw found it a little easier to track down

prey. While she enjoyed the group hunting, normal hunting was much simpler. Soon, she'd caught a huge squirrel to give to the elders and a couple of mice that the queens might enjoy.

She carried her catches back to the meeting place they'd decided. Duskpaw was already there, a rabbit in his jaws. The prey from the group hunting rested in a pile beside him.

Dawnpaw dropped her fresh-kill in front of her. "Hey, Duskpaw. Nice catch."

"Thanks," the tabby tom replied. "Woah! That's a huge squirrel!"

Silverpaw emerged from the trees, a thrush and vole clamped firmly in her mouth. She held her tail high triumphantly, but dropped her fresh-kill in astonishment when she noticed Dawnpaw's squirrel.

"Wow!" she exclaimed, seeming to forget that she didn't like Dawnpaw.

Dawnpaw was almost disappointed. She'd hoped for a rude remark from the silver tabby, because she generally enjoyed arguing with her. It was fun — entertaining, even.

At last Brightpaw appeared, with nothing but a scrawny mouse in her jaws. She dropped her prey and scanned the others, an envious expression lacing her face. Nobody said anything. They just picked up all the prey they could and took it back to camp, where their mentors were waiting with their own fresh-kill.

"Well done, you four," Foxclaw commented as their dropped their catches on the fresh-kill pile.

"Looks like you've mastered the group hunting technique," Alderbark added. He glanced at his apprentice's tiny mouse, but didn't say anything. Brightpaw hung her head sadly.

Dawnpaw rested her tail on her sister's shoulder. "It's okay. You'll catch something better next time!"

"Maybe," Brightpaw deadpanned, shrugging.

"Eat, and then go sleep," Spidervenom instructed them. "But first take something to the queens and elders."

Nodding, Dawnpaw picked up her squirrel and delivered to the fallen tree at the edge of the hollow. Halfleg, Faunspeckle and Paleglow seemed satisfied with the squirrel and vole Duskpaw dropped off. Next, Dawnpaw eagerly padded up the rocky ledge to the cave in the side of the hollow — the nursery. The meows of kits reached her ears as she and Duskpaw pushed their way past the thorns and thick ferns guarding the entrance. Instantly, the milky scent of the nursery greeted Dawnpaw, almost making her long to relive the days she had spent there, as kit, curled up in the safety of her mother's nest with Brightpaw by her side.

Currently there was two queens — Lilypad and Rosehoney. Lilypad's moon-old kits were meowing pitifully in their nest, as their mother gently pushed them to her belly. Rosehoney's older kittens were already sleeping soundly, curled up in surprisingly big bundles beside their mother's ginger tabby pelt. Dawnpaw dropped a rabbit beside the two queens. She bend down and gently licked both of Rosehoney's kits on the head. They stirred slightly, but didn't wake.

They were her kin. Rosehoney was Sunflower's sister — which made these gorgeous kits her kin. She felt a burst of pride in her chest as she watched the five-moon old kits sleep.

There was one last cat in the den; Spidervenom, who Dawnpaw guessed had just arrived. He was Rosehoney's mate, which made Dawnpaw even more fond of her friend's mentor.

"Thanks for the rabbit," Lilypad meowed to them as her kits's noise died down. "And the vole." She blinked gratefully at Duskpaw.

Dawnpaw dipped her head and left the den, Duskpaw beside her. They wandered down to the fresh-kill pile and chose a bird each. Silverpaw was already eating beside the apprentices's den, but Brightpaw was nowhere to be found. Once she was finished, Dawnpaw gave herself a quick wash as the sun set, rose-coloured rays shooting out across the sky. Dusk.

The sound of Brightpaw curling up in her nest traveled from the den. Dawnpaw felt a little disappointed that her sister didn't want to stay and chat with the others, but Brightpaw was probably just really tired.

The three apprentices stayed outside, chatting and watching the light slowly fade away as the moon rose steadily into view. For that moment at least, Dawnpaw felt peaceful.

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Hi everyone!

I actually wrote 2 chapters in one day — whoop whoop! I'm proud of myself. So, why do you think Brightpaw has a strange scratch on her leg? Where did it come from?

I'm so happy that I've written up to chapter five, and still have the motivation to continue it! Even though it's been months since I started this book, I'm still super excited for this project. Currently I've been publishing at random times, but I might start a schedule for when I publish.

Have a good day/night!

- Koa <3
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Chapter 6

[image]

Tension was high in the Clan, even days after Otterstar's warning. Cinderstar was talking with his senior warriors below the Boulder. Meanwhile, Dimlight had gathered the junior warriors to strengthen the defences around camp. The kits and elders were hidden away in their dens and the queens were fortifying the nursery with the help of Silverpaw.

Dawnpaw got stuck with the job of helping Tumbleweed build up the defences at the entrance tunnel. She liked the idea of helping the Clan, but she had to admit the work was achingly dull. At least Duskpaw had been roped in too, meanwhile Brightpaw was out hunting with Alderbark. *Dawnpaw wished she was, too.*

"I'm going to go find some more of this," Tumbleweed told them as Dawnpaw pressed some more thorns into the entrance. With those words, the brown-and-white tom padded away into the forest.

Duskpaw glanced at the tabby molly beside him, concern dancing in his amber gaze. "Are you okay?" he asked her, three simple words that Dawnpaw was extremely grateful for.

"I'm worried about Brightpaw," she admitted, hoping that no other cat was eavesdropping. "She had that random scratch on her...and she's been acting strange lately."

"I've noticed that you two aren't as close as you used to be," Duskpaw meowed, and thankfully he kept the pity out of his voice.

Dawnpaw didn't want anyone to feel sorry for her; but it was nice to talk to her denmate. Gingerly, she told Duskpaw about the argument she'd had with her sister at Lilypond...*that felt like years ago.* She mentioned how hurt she'd felt when Brightpaw didn't want to hear about the Gathering that night, and all the other disagreements they'd shared.

The older tom listened with a calculating gaze. Dawnpaw didn't know what he was thinking. But he didn't interrupt, he didn't tell her it will all blow over. He just listened and appeared to be half-focusing on reinforcing the entrance tunnel.

"She hasn't been herself lately," the ginger-and-white molly concluded. "What do you think?"

"You need to talk to her," Duskpaw decided, expression serious, "about the arguments. I don't think the scratch means anything, though. It probably was just a thorn in her nest."

"But she was very defensive when I asked about it," Dawnpaw pointed out.

He just shrugged. "Maybe you're just being a little too nosy," Duskpaw suggested. "Maybe Brightpaw wants some privacy...after all, we're growing up, and figuring out who we are as a cat. It makes sense that she'd want to keep some things to herself. The arguments don't mean anything, Daw...you're still sisters, after all. But..."

"But?" Dawnpaw prompted when he trailed away into silence. Despite her flash of annoying at her friend's suggestion that she was being too nosy, what he was saying made sense. Kind of.

"But you still need to talk with her," the dust-brown tom concluded. He weaved the last thorn branch into the border of the entrance tunnel. "Half finished."

Just as Dawnpaw opened her mouth to answer, Alderbark pushed his way past them and hurried into camp. She noticed his pricked ears, tense body and the worried look in his amber gaze. Feeling a spark of nervousness inside her, she pushed Duskpaw out of the tunnel and into camp, ignoring his protests. Alderbark had come back...but not Brightpaw. Where was she? And why did her sister's mentor look so worried?

"Cinderstar!" Alderbark called. In an instant FernClan's leader was beside him, taking in the dark ginger tom's obvious concern.

"What is it?" Foxclaw asked as she darted to her brother's side. The Clan gathered around, wondering what Alderbark was so worked up about.

"Brightpaw's missing," her sister's mentor announced, worry lacing his voice. "We were hunting along the stream, and all of a sudden she was gone."

Cinderstar's eyes fell into slits. "We should just wait and see if she comes back," he meowed slowly. Dawnpaw felt a shiver go down her spine at the word *if*.

"But with the threat of ReedClan," Dimlight pointed out to their leader. He scanned the gathered cats. "Should we really take that chance? Brightpaw could be in trouble."

Dawnpaw tensed. What if Brightpaw was being attacked by full-grown warriors right now? They had to do something!

"You're right, Dimlight," Cinderstar admitted. "Alright. Alderbark, take Thrushwhisker to where you last saw Brightpaw. Foxclaw, you can take Dawnpaw and Duskpaw to the forest between the Thunderpath and the Twoleg path." He continued calling out cats's names, sending them all over the forest in search of Brightpaw.

Foxclaw led Dawnpaw and Duskpaw out of camp. Worry prickled along the youngest molly's spine. Something was wrong with her sister. *She could feel it.*

They reached the stretch of forest and sniffed around in the undergrowth, but Brightpaw's scent was nowhere to be found. Dawnpaw thought she caught a trace of it on a holly bush, but the scent was whisked away almost immediately. Brightpaw had to be okay, right? She was probably just chasing a rabbit and didn't notice how far she'd strayed from the Twoleg path.

"Dawnpaw!" Duskpaw's meow rang out through the forest, sending a group of crows flapping their way into the air, squawking loudly. *A murder of crows,* Dawnpaw though with a shiver, hoping it wasn't a sign from StarClan.

She raced through the undergrowth to her denmate's side. They were near the Thunderpath now. The disgusting smell wafted its way through the air and into Dawnpaw's nose.

"Look," Duskpaw meowed, nodding to the space beside the empty Thunderpath.

A dust-stained heap of ginger-and-white fur lay on the muddy grass. Dawnpaw drew a sharp breath in, and instantly regretted it as the fowl taste of monsters entered her mouth and clawed at her throat. But she didn't hesitate. Not even thinking, she dashed forward and grabbed her sister's scruff, dragging her limp body back to where Duskpaw was waiting, in the shelter of a bush.

No.

No, she can't be dead.

She wasn't. Dawnpaw saw the rise and fall of Brightpaw's flank as soon as she let go of her. She breathed out a sigh of relief. She was alive. And that was all that mattered.

Foxclaw appeared beside them, and gasped when she saw Brightpaw. The calico molly didn't say anything — she just grabbed Brightpaw and started dragging her through the forest, eyes narrowed in concentration. Dawnpaw helped Duskpaw lift her sister up onto Foxclaw's back, and when Alderbark appeared with Thrushwhisker, the two warriors helped her support the young apprentice's weight. Dawnpaw trailed behind, with Duskpaw's flank pressed against her own in an effort to comfort her.

Once at camp, Dimlight sent out cats to go collect the patrols searching for Brightpaw. Meanwhile, Dawnpaw helped Foxclaw deliver her sister to the medicine cats. Dreamhaunt hurried around the den, gathering herbs, while Mintleaf lowered Brightpaw into a nest and forced her to drink some water. Her sister didn't stir, but she swallowed the clear liquid.

Sunflower burst into the den, worry alive and well in her yellow gaze. Dawnpaw watched as her mother washed the filth off Brightpaw's fur.

"We found her near the Thunderpath," Duskpaw explained as Cinderstar entered the den.

Foxclaw glanced at Brightpaw once more and padded outside, tail held high. Duskpaw followed her, casting a look at Dawnpaw over his shoulder as he left.

"Will she be okay?" Sunflower asked Mintleaf.

One last cat pushed his way into the den: Thrushwhisker, their father. "Is Brightpaw fine?" he wanted to know, oblivious to the fact that his mate had just considered the same thing.

Mintleaf sniffed Brightpaw carefully. "She'll be okay," the medicine cat told them as she drew back. "Dreamhaunt! Get some of those smelly flowers!"

The medicine cat apprentice appeared, a bright yellow flower between his jaws. He gave it to Mintleaf, who crushed it under Brightpaw's nose.

Slowly, Dawnpaw's sister stirred and then jolted awake, sage eyes wide and whiskers twitching. Mintleaf purred and cleared the remains of the flower away.

"What happened?" Dawnpaw asked immediately.

Brightpaw blinked up at the gathered cats. Cinderstar, watching calmly with concern on his gaze; Sunflower, gently licking her ruffled fur; Thrushwhisker, tail lashing from beside his leader; Mintleaf, who was gathering herbs in front of her; and Dreamhaunt, who sat back with his tail wrapped around his paws, a jealous gleam in his eyes as he watched Dawnpaw's worried expression for her sister.

"I...tripped," Brightpaw stammered, blinking. "And hit my head on a rock."

Mintleaf felt around Brightpaw's head and then gave her a poppy seed. "You should spend the night here," she decided. "I need to see if there's anything wrong with your head." She gave Brightpaw a poultice of some kind, and then Brightpaw curled up and rested her

head on her paws.

Sunflower wrapped herself around her daughter and began washing her ears.

"Out, all of you," Mintleaf demanded. "Brightpaw will be fine."

Slowly, cats left the den, Dawnpaw trailing at the back. Duskpaw and Silverpaw were waiting outside the medicine den, ears pricked. Dawnpaw knew they'd been eavesdropping, but it saved her the trouble of explaining everything to them herself.

"Let's get back to that entrance tunnel," she meowed to Duskpaw. Silverpaw rolled her eyes.

"It's finished," she meowed, as if Dawnpaw was stupid. "While you guys were on your little adventure, Tumbleweed and Honeybee finished it."

Dawnpaw felt relieved. She was tired after her trek through the woods. She felt like curling up in her nest even though it was still sunhigh, but of course the world had other plans.

Appleseed dashed into camp, with Daisystem and Flowerpetal on his heels.

"ReedClan!" he yelped. "They've moved the border!"

The clearing went silent, and then all the cats began talking at once. The elders wandered out of their den to see what was happening, only adding to the commotion. The apprentices sat at the edge of it all, but Silverpaw was still very vocal about her opionions.

"Silence!" Cinderstar's voice rang out across the hollow, his urgent tone forcing the noise to die down.

Appleseed explained how they'd been patrolling along the ReedClan border and noticed that the markers had been moved forward slightly. They hadn't stretched past Lilypond, however, but it seemed like they planned too.

Cinderstar was listening with a calm expression. Around him, cats

had narrowed eyes and lashing tails. Dawnpaw dug her claws into the ground. How dare ReedClan try and steal their territory!

"We have to go fight them!" Birdsong piped up. Beside him, Alderbark was nodding in agreement.

Cinderstar leapt up onto the Boulder. He didn't have to call the Clan — everyone but Sunflower and Brightpaw were already waiting expectantly.

"No," he began. "We will not go fight them."

The cats began yowling at Cinderstar, demanding to fight and teach ReedClan a lesson.

"Dimlight, take a patrol to the ReedClan border and remark it," FernClan's leader went on. "where it's *supposed* to be. And do not fight unless you have too. We will continue reinforcing the camp. Mentors, please take your apprentices out for some battle training."

Dawnpaw felt a rush of exitement. Battle training! They'd just been hunting in the last few days. Beside her, Duskpaw's eyes shone and Silverpaw was kneading the ground in anticipation.

The ginger-and-white molly half wished that a battle would commence between ReedClan and FernClan. She'd only ever been in one battle, many moons ago...but that was a tiny fight with only a few warriors on either side. The idea of a real battle exhilarated her.

She hoped one would happen soon.

~ ~~

Hi everyone!

Sorry that my whole book unpublished — I was adding the banners without wifi, and it just decided to unpublish. Get ready for some action next chapter, though!

Have a good day/night!

- Koa <3

Chapter 7

[image]

Fighting was just something that happened in life. Nobody could live in the forest among the Clans without taking part in a battle; they didn't happen often, but when they did, neither Clan was prepared for the horrors that would follow.

Dawnpaw was just about to leave for battle training with Foxclaw when there was a snarl, and all of a sudden a brown tom shoved his way through the entrance tunnel and straight into camp.

Otterstar.

More cats followed, and with a screech that echoed high up into the air, the battle began.

FernClan was unprepared. Half the cats were still sleepy. The elders had to scramble into the nursery and hurry the kits in after them as their mothers rushed to join the fight. FernClan may have been unprepared, but they weren't outnumbered. ReedClan only brought half their warriors — however FernClan had the advantage of their whole Clan fighting.

A small tabby tom threw himself at Dawnpaw, and she reacted almost instantly. Blood splattered the ground at she raked her claws over his snout. The tabby hissed in pain, but he swiped out with an outstretched paw, clawing at her ankles. Dawnpaw dodged just in time and leapt up onto the tabby's back, digging her claws in and ignoring his howls of pain. Only when she bit down on his shoulder did blood fill her mind and the echoes of screeching cats ring in her ears. *No. It was too much.* With a gasp, she let go to of the enemy apprentice, but she'd done enough damage. The tabby swiped out bravely, barely touching her hind leg, and then raced away, crashing into Robinflight as he ran.

Dawnpaw shook herself and turned to face the next enemy — a

young warrior, fully grown, but she was almost the same size as her. Focusing in nothing in but the battle, Dawnpaw lashed out and managed to make the warrior's front legs bleed. Scarlet blood splattered her flank as she dashed around the enemy, raking a paw down her side. The molly reacted by leaping onto Dawnpaw's back and digging his claws in. She felt pain sting her sides as the warrior bit down on her shoulder. She let go when the apprentice yelped in pain, but that didn't stop the older warrior from raking her claws down Dawnpaw's sides.

In a flash, the warrior was knocked off Dawnpaw. Standing beside her was Brightpaw, panting slightly. Dawnpaw didn't ask questions. Together the sisters threw strike after strike at the molly, until she were overwhelmed and raced off into the depths of the battle.

Blood roared in Dawnpaw's ears as she teamed up with Brightpaw to fight off more cats.

But it was when a familiar black-and-white tom launched himself at her that she paused. *Ripplepaw.* Even though she didn't particularly know the ReedClan apprentice that well, her friend Moonpaw seemed to really like him. Could she really make her friend's friend bleed?

Yes. Moonpaw won't know.

Brightpaw was busy fighting a smaller ReedClan molly. Even with her head injury, Dawnpaw's sister still managed to dodge her opponent's attacks and claw at her snout.

Ripplepaw used Dawnpaw's hesitation to swipe at her flank. Blood dropped onto the ground, staining it red. Dawnpaw closed her eyes and launched herself at him, pretending it was someone she didn't know. Someone who wasn't her friend's friend.

She raked her claws down his sides and bit his neck, causing him to throw her off. But she dug her claws in and hung on tight, and Ripplepaw grew tired, despite being older and bigger than her. Dawnpaw pushed him away and leapt off him, and Ripplepaw snarled, darting back into the thick of the battle. However, that wasn't Dawnpaw's focus.

Her ankle twisted awkwardly when she landed, causing her to yowl in pain. When she scanned her leg, it looked normal, however, it ached like nothing she'd experienced before.

But ReedClan was losing.

She watched as the FernClan warriors chased off attacker after attacker, snarling and clawing at anyone who dared remain in their camp. The enemy cats dashed away out of the tunnel and Dawnpaw heard them crashing through the undergrowth beyond to get back home.

Only Otterstar stayed behind. He growled at Cinderstar, "This isn't over!" and then he was gone too, hissing at any FernClan warrior who strayed in his path.

Sides heaving, Dawnpaw lay down and rested her sore ankle beside her. All around camp, warriors looked surprised at the short battle. However, that did not mean anyone was spared from injuries. Mintleaf and Dreamhaunt dashed from cat to cat, mending their wounds with cobweb and marigold and giving them poppy seeds to ease the pain.

Brightpaw settled down beside Dawnpaw. There was a spark of amusement in her eyes.

"How did you manage to get Mintleaf to let you fight?" Dawnpaw asked.

"She decided my head was fine enough to join in," her sister explained. "I still have to spend the night in the medicine den, though."

"You did amazing," Dawnpaw admitted, feeling a spark of pride for her sister.

"So did you!" the patched ginger-and-white molly shot back.

Mintleaf padded over to them, herbs clamped between her jaws. She started patching up Brightpaw's wounds, feeling her head gently just in case Brightpaw had hurt it while fighting. Then she moved onto Dawnpaw. Her scratches stung as the cobweb and

marigold was pressed into them, but she held still until Mintleaf was done.

"Great StarClan," the tortoiseshell medicine cat breathed as she sniffed Dawnpaw's twisted ankle. "Both of you, come with me."

Brightpaw helped support her sister as they follow Mintleaf back to the medicine den. Dreamhaunt was still tending to the Clan's wounds, so the den was empty. Both sisters lay down on seperate nests, exhaustion running through them. Mintleaf checked on Brightpaw's head once more, and then moved on to give Dawnpaw some poppy seeds, which she licked up gratefully.

Her ankle was bandaged, and then Silverpaw burst into the den, some fur missing along her tail.

"What happens to you two?" she meowed in surprise when she saw the sisters.

"What's wrong, Silverpaw?" Mintleaf asked the silver-striped tabby.

"My father has called a Clan meeting," Silverpaw announced proudly. She gazed at Dawnpaw and Brightpaw. "And *they* need to be there."

Sighing, Mintleaf guided them out of the den and into the clearing, where Cinderstar was waiting upon the Boulder. Duskpaw was currently seating in the middle of the large circle of cats, his pelt neatly groomed despite the cobwebs and marigold.

"What's going on?" Dawnpaw whispered to Silverpaw, however the older apprentice did not have time to react.

"Silverpaw, Duskpaw, Dawnpaw and Brightpaw," Cinderstar's meow rang out across the clearing. "Step forward."

They hurried to stand beside Duskpaw. Confusion still clouded her mind, but the ginger-and-white tabby didn't ask any questions.

"Your mentors have agreed that you four are ready to begin the final stage in your training," Cinderstar went on. "Silverpaw, step forward."

The silver tabby stepped forward as her father looked down at her, affection visible in his ice-blue gaze. Dawnpaw felt a bubble of exitement burst inside her as she realised what was happening.

She was finally getting her warrior name.

"StarClan," Cinderstar yowled to the sky. "I ask that you look down upon these four apprentices, who have trained hard and proved themselves loyal additions to FernClan over and over again." He looked down at Silverpaw again. "Silverpaw, do you promise to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?"

"I do," Silverpaw breathed, eyes wide. Despite how much she disliked the hot-headed molly, Dawnpaw felt proud on Silverpaw's behalf.

"Then I welcome you to FernClan as warrior," Cinderstar finished. "Silverpaw, from this moment onward you will be known as Silvermist. Serve your Clan well, daughter."

Silvermist dipped her head, stepping backwards.

"Duskpaw," Cinderstar's voice rang out across the hollow once again. "Do you promise to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?"

Duskpaw's eyes shone with exitement as he answered, "I do."

"Then I welcome you as a warrior," their leader called. "Duskpaw, from this moment on you will be known as Duskshade. Serve your Clan well, young one."

Next it was Dawnpaw's turn. She felt a rush of happiness as her name was called. Sunflower and Thrushwhisker were sitting side by side at the front of the gathered cats, pride shining in both their gazes.

"Dawnpaw, do you promise to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?" Cinderstar asked her, as he had done for both cats before her.

"I do," Dawnpaw answered, trying her best to not start jumping up

and down in excitement. That was now kits and apprentices acted — not warriors.

"Then I welcome you as a warrior," he continued. "Dawnpaw, from this moment onwards you will be known as Dawnrise. Serve your Clan well."

Dawnrise dipped her head, happy at her warrior name. Next, Brightpaw was turned into Brightglow, a fitting name that Dawnrise approved of. The yowls of cats calling their new names rose up into the sky, filing the trees with the voices of FernClan. It was good noise — noise that showed their was hope.

As her parents and sister crowed around her, Dawnrise noticed that the sun was setting, golden rays fanning out across the sky and turning her pelt to flame.

Dusk.

Maybe it didn't always signify the end of something — maybe like dawn, dusk could also show the start of something. A new beginning. Just a different kind.

Because this was certainly the start of something new.

~ ~~

Hi everyone!

A lot of things happened this chapter, and I know the battle was short, but this sets up the storyline for events later in the book. Everything in A Splatter of Blood happens for a reason, don't worry!

I might be doing a lot of double-publishes at the moment, because usually I write 2 chapters in a day and then publish them in the afternoon when I have wifi.

Have a good day/night!

- Koa <3

Chapter 8

[image]

No more friends in other Clans.

It was dangerous; it threatened the sudden respect Dawnrise had earned from her Clanmates. She liked Moonpaw and Skypaw — but they couldn't be friends. She needed to remain loyal to her Clan. The fight with Ripplepaw still lingered in her mind; she'd been scared to hurt him. That couldn't happen again. *No more friends in other Clans.* Polite conversation was all she'd undertake at Gatherings; and she'd leave Moonpaw and Skypaw alone.

Dawnrise was awake not long after the sun rose, limping heavily on her twisted ankle. She was seated beside Brightglow in the medicine den, watching Mintleaf check on her sister's head. Once the ginger-patched molly was told she could return to her warrior duties, the medicine cat focused on Dawnrise's sore ankle.

"You'll have to stay in camp," the tortoiseshell sighed as she replaced the bandage. "Sorry, Dawnrise. I know you were looking forward to your first day as a warrior."

Dawnrise shrugged. Had she been looking forward to it? *Yes,* she decided. She'd dreamt about being a warrior ever since she was kit — and finally, it was real.

The two sisters left the den, Dawnrise still limping a little. Duskshade was eating a mouse beside the tree stump, so they padded over to join him.

"Hey," the dust-brown tom greeted them. "It feels nice to be eating on the *warriors's* side of camp now."

"I felt the same when I become a warrior," Foxclaw meowed as she padded past. She flicked Dawnrise's shoulder. "Don't get up to trouble. Remember, you'll always be my apprentice."

Dawnrise nodded, feeling a glow of warmth in her at her old mentor's words. She was fond of Foxclaw — as a kit she'd always looked up the calico, and she was beyond happy to be trained by her. Foxclaw was like a second mother to Dawnrise, and the ginger-and-white tabby knew that the warrior was just as proud of her as Sunflower was.

"We better go join Dimlight," Duskshade realised. FernClan's deputy was seated near the Boulder, with most of the warriors gathered around him. Dawnrise realised that he was organising the patrols.

The three of them finished off their breakfast and joined the Clan, waiting for their names to be called.

"Robinflight, take Spidervenom and Birdsong and patrol along the HeatherClan border," Dimlight was meowing. "Meanwhile, Daisystem and Deerhoof can patrol along the ReedClan border."

Daisystem had an uneasy look in her eyes. Dawnrise noticed for the first time that the white molly looked...*bigger*, than usual. Her sand-coloured tail was flicking back and forth. Was she eating while hunting? *That was against the warrior code!*

"Actually, I need to tell you something," Daisystem announced. She glanced at Deerhoof, who nodded. "We're...*I'm* pregnant."

Dimlight stared at her in shock. "Oh! Well, congrats!"

Dawnrise felt a purr rise in her throat as the warriors meowed their congratulations to Daisystem. It was good that the Clan had more kits on the way, considering the fact that there was no more apprentices. Deerhoof and Daisystem sat there, one looking proud and the other slightly nervous.

"In that case, Sunflower and Thrushwhisker can patrol," the light brown tabby went on. Dimlight shot a grin at Deerhoof. "I suppose you would like to help Daisystem settle into the nursery?"

Deerhoof nodded, and Daisystem rolled her eyes.

"Now for our newest warriors," Dimlight went on with a gleam in his eyes. "Dawnrise can —"

"I have to stay in camp as well," Dawnrise interrupted quickly.

"Don't tell me you're pregnant, too!" Daisystem meowed to her, purring at the horrified look on the new warrior's face.

"No!" the ginger and white molly blurted out. "No, it's because of my ankle. Mintleaf's orders."

Dimlight shrugged. "Alright then. Duskshade, you can keep her company. *Brightglow* can lead the patrol, with Silvermist and Foxclaw. You can go hunting. Now for the sunhigh patrols..." he continued barking out orders, but Dawnrise was already turning away.

Duskshade sat beside her. "I'm slightly glad about this."

"About what?" Dawnrise asked him.

"My job," the older warrior answered. "I don't mind keeping you company."

Dawnrise didn't reply. She felt happier at his comment. She liked that Duskshade enjoyed spending time with her.

Trying to distract herself, she watched Daisystem and Deerhoof pad over to the nursery. Maybe they should help her settle in, or keep the kits out of their fur.

"Come on," she meowed to Duskshade, leading him over to the nursery.

Milk-scent wafted in the air as they pushed their way inside. It was slightly crowded, considering the amount of cats in there. Lilypad and Rosehoney were preparing a nest for Daisystem at the back, meanwhile the kits were playing with a moss ball. Occasionally the ball would roll over to one of the queens and trip them over.

"That's it!" Rosehoney grumbled as she stood back up. Her kits rushed over and meowed "sorry" before taking the moss ball back again.

"We can take them outside," Dawnrise offered. She flicked her ear at

Duskshade. "and play with them."

"Please do," Lilypad sighed. "They're so full of energy today."

Duskshade gathered the kits and Dawnrise led them outside onto the clearing. The littlest kit had the moss ball still clamped in his teeth.

"Hello!" the white molly with brown flecks spoke cheerfully. Leopardkit, Dawnrise remembered. *Dimlight's daughter.*

"Hi there," Duskshade answered. He sat down and glanced at Dawnrise, obviously not sure what to do.

"I'm Featherkit," Leopardkit's sister introduced. She was an exact copy of Leopardkit, but minus the brown flecks.

"We know who you are," Dawnrise purred. She looked at the smallest kit, a brown tabby tom. Treekit. *He looked so much like Dimlight.* She looked down at the moss ball in his jaws. "So you're playing moss ball?"

"Yes!" Amberkit called out. She took the bundle of moss from Treekit and tossed it up in the air towards Dawnrise.

The ginger and white molly caught the moss ball between her teeth, and threw it back into the air for the kits to catch. Thistlekit grabbed it, and Amberkit wrestled her brother for the moss ball and he rolled it away from her. Duskshade soon joined in, throwing the moss ball a little further so the kits had to scramble away to catch it.

"What's going on here?" Spidervenom appeared, a laughing tone lacing his voice. The black tom was walking over to the nursery. Dawnrise glanced up at the sky. If Spidervenom was back from patrol, then it must be nearly sunhigh.

"Spidervenom!" Amberkit and Thistlekit cheered, running over to him. Spidervenom purred, mock-attacking them and pretending to be defeated as the kits leapt at him. It gave Dawnrise a nice feeling watching her kin play with their father.

Treekit wandered over and sat down at Dawnrise's paws. "Thistlekit squashed the moss ball," he told her, green eyes wide. "We can't play anymore."

"Nonsense," Dawnrise told him. She looked around camp and collected a couple of sticks and placed then on the ground. Yellow eyes met sage and sky-blue ones as she turned her attention back to the three remaining kits.

"Try and jump from one stick to the other," she informed them. "It's a competition."

"I'm gonna win!" Leopardkit declared, squatting down at one stick and leaping to the other. She almost made it, huffing in annoyance.

"No, I am!" Treekit protested. He repeated what his sister had done, but he made the jump. *He made it.* Dawnrise had placed the stick where she thought would be just out of the kits's reach, but the small brown tabby had landed squarely on the stick, yowling in triumph.

Duskshade sat down next to her as they watched the kits play.

"You'd be good mother," he commented, and then seemed to regret the words as soon as they left his mouth. "I mean — only if you *want* to be a queen...it's not like — um, you only just became a warrior, I know —" He cut his voice of completely, staring at the kits.

Dawnrise looked at her paws. She hadn't ever thought about having kits. Besides, she was only eleven moons old. Instead of thinking about it, she focussed on Treekit. The little tom had caught her attention almost immediately. Something about the brown tabby interested her...secretly, she hoped that she would be given the privilege of mentoring Treekit.

Brightglow soon returned, chatting with Silvermist while Foxclaw stalked ahead. Each cat had prey clamped between their jaws. The two younger mollies looked proud of their first catches as warriors.

As her sister dropped her fresh-kill on the pile and wandered over

to her, Dawnrise noticed the obvious scratch that laced Brightglow's muzzle. *It hadn't been there yesterday.* Maybe she just got it from hunting — Dawnrise was probably just overthinking it, but the random scratches that appeared on her littermate were starting to bug her.

"Where'd that come from?" Dawnrise questioned Brightglow as the patched tabby came closer. She flicked her tail at the scratch, raising an eyebrow.

Brightglow shrugged, her face expressionless. "I don't know," she deadpanned, her green gaze not once meeting Dawnrise's sun-coloured eyes. "I probably just got scratched by a stick while hunting."

Dawnrise narrowed her eyes, but decided to let it go. *Where are these scratched really coming from?*

And why won't Brightglow tell me?

~ ~~

Hi everyone!

Not much really happened this chapter, but there needs to be some bonding between Dawnrise and Treekit. Any theories about where Brightglow's scratch came from?

Sorry for not publishing for ages, but I was busy with school and stuff.

Have a good day/night!

- Koa <3

Chapter 9

[image]

Two weeks passed as green-leaf gently slipped into leaf-fall, reminding the Clan yet again that they had a limited time until the prey disappeared. Dawnrise gratefully thanked the spirits of StarClan that her ankle healed swiftly, so she could finally begin her warrior duties.

Soon it became instinct, a routine. Dawnrise woke each morning, ate, and happily joined whatever patrols Dimglow assigned her too. In her free time she helped her Clan however she could: patching up a gaping hole in the nursery, or helping Mintleaf and Dreamhaunt gather herbs, however the young grey medicine cat barely acknowledged her work. Mintleaf, on the other paw, was grateful. Dawnrise often spent hours hunting with her friends, determined to keep FernClan well fed until leaf-bare finally gripped them. Snow had yet to lace the ground, but that was expected only a few weeks into lead-fall.

Dawnrise noted the chill in the air as she woke that morning, stretching and padding outside in search of fresh-kill. Duskshade and Silvermist were seated near the warriors' den, fur fluffed up against the cool breeze. She rushed off to retrieve something from the pile of prey before she joined them.

"I'm worried about the apprentice situation," Greenwillow was murmuring to the white queen Lilypad beside the fresh-kill pile. Her sage gaze flicked to Dawnrise and back to Lilypad, as if uninterested in the ginger molly. Lilypad, however, gave her a friendly smile.

Dawnrise flicked her ears to greet them and bent down to survey the food options.

"How can the Clan function when there's no apprentices?" Greenwillow went on. "If I was Cinderstar, I would have made

Dawnrise and Brightglow train a little longer."

Dawnrise bit down on a thrush angrily. The older warrior was talking about her as if she wasn't right there. *But she had to admit, Greenwillow was partly right.*

"Relax, Greenwillow," Lilypad responded softly. "Rosehoney's kits are almost six moons old. I wouldn't be surprised if they were apprenticed soon."

Greenwillow just huffed, then appeared thoughtful for a moment and softened. "Alright," she meowed. "I just hope I get to mentor one of them — I haven't had an apprentice since Honeybee was made a warrior!"

Dawnrise picked the thrush from the fresh-kill pile and stalked over to her friends. Irritation ran through her in waves, flooding her mind. It was true that in the back of her thoughts, she was confused as to why Cinderstar had made her an apprentice at the same time as Silvermist. The silver tabby had been apprenticed around the time Dawnrise and Brightglow were born.

She pushed the thought firmly away; today would be a good day.

Duskshade greeted her warmly as she sat crouched down beside him to eat, while Silvermist opted for a polite — yet not friendly — hello. Foxclaw and Brightglow emerged from the den together, both meowing a quick "morning" before padding away. Foxclaw dashed out of camp, probably off to hunt while the prey was still out looking for breakfast.

"Come on," Silvermist deadpanned as soon as Dawnrise was finished eating. She tossed her head. "Dimglow is waiting."

"I wonder if he'll do anything about the fox sighting," Dawnrise wondered aloud to her denmates as they hurried over to the circle of warriors.

"Now that we're all here," Dimglow began, "Silvermist and Honeybee can take the sunhigh patrol, along both the borders. I want Robinflight to lead a hunting patrol — you can choose who

can accompany you." He paused while the cats mentioned scrambled away. "There have been multiple fox sightings lately, so we need a patrol to take care of it. Greenwillow, Thrushwhisker, and Dawnrise, you can come with me to chase the fox off."

Dawnrise's tail lifted a little higher. She was going on the patrol! What better way to serve your Clan than to chase a threat off the territory?

Dimglow gathered the patrol and they marched out of camp, tails and heads held high. *That mangy fox would be terrified off them.* Dawnrise followed FernClan's deputy through the forrest to Appletrees, noticing the smell of fox that laced the air. It got stronger as they neared the middle of the apple tree forrest, giving the ginger-and-white tabby an uneasy feeling.

At Dimglow's command, the cats lowered into a crouch and snuck though the undergrowth, dodging around stray apples that decorated the ground. *Then they noticed the fox up ahead*. It was tall and ginger, with ears like a cat yet the long snout of a dog, and a bushy tail swinging behind it.

Dawnrise narrowed her eyes. The cats spread out around the fox, eyes and tails low. They waited for Dimglow's signal. The fox's head suddenly shot up, alert, eyes scanning the ground. Dawnrise watched as her deputy's tail rose and fell back down again, and then she pounced.

Her claws raked the fox's sides, causing the big ginger beast to howl in pain. The fox lashed out at the cats, but it's movements were clumsy, and it was surprised by their attack. Dawnrise threw a series of blows at the creature's snout, over and over again. Dimglow was darting around the fox, slicing at its legs and underbelly. Thrushwhisker leaped on top of the beast, raking his sharp claws along the fox's back. Howls from both the fox and the cats filled the air, clogging Dawnrise's senses. She paused suddenly, the screaming becoming to much. *It was too much.*

A big paw slammed into her face, and she fell to the ground. Dawnrise focused, shaking her head to clear the yowls away. The fox was above her, snarling. Quickly the ginger tabby flipped over

and kicked at the creature's head, sending it staggering backwards into Greenwillow's claws.

The fox threw a few more blows at the cats, slicing Dawnrise's shoulder, then turned and fled. Dimglow raced after it with Greenwillow at his heels.

Dawnrise sat down, panting, wincing at the pain in her shoulder. She hardly noticed Thrushwhisker as he sat down beside her.

"I'm proud of you," he meowed, out of the blue. Sage eyes met yellow ones as Dawnrise locked gazes with her father. He was telling the truth — pride shone from within his eyes, and spread to his expression.

"Thanks," Dawnrise mumbled. She'd never been that close with her father — they had a good relationship, but she was closer with her mother than she ever had been with Thrushwhisker.

Pawsteps echoed throughout Appletrees, and then Dimglow and Greenwillow appeared, panting. Greenwillow had a cut along her front leg and Dimglow was limping.

"Let's head back to camp," the light brown deputy suggested, and they began padding back home, Dimglow in the lead.

Dawnrise smiled her herself. She'd helped her Clan. The kits were safe now because of her.

But as they neared camp, Dawnrise's mood dropped abruptly. The smell of blood hung in the air, clogging her nose, screaming at her. The other cats sensed it too, and their pawsteps slowed to a stop.

"Something's wrong," Dimglow meowed, fear creeping into his tone. "Come on!" He raced away, the other cats sticking close to his tail.

They found the source of the smell at the entrance to camp.

Foxclaw was lying in a heap on the ground, throat slashed, blood flowing freely, any sign of life already gone.

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No.

No. No. NO.

Dawnrise didn't realise that she was shaking until Thrushwhisker gently rested his tail on her back. She couldn't feel her paws. Or her tail. Or *anything.* She felt numb, from head to toe.

No.

Foxclaw couldn't be *dead.* Dawnrise wanted to run to her former mentor, to bury her face in her fur. But she couldn't move. *She couldn't breathe.*

"*Foxclaw*," she managed to choke out, and that was all it took for her to crumble.

Dawnrise sank to the ground, violently shaking, eyes closed. A wave of grief overtook her, threatening to drown her in her own sadness.

"Dawnrise," her father's voice echoed though the grief that blocked her senses. "Dawnrise, listen to me. Breathe. In and out."

So she did. *In, out. In, out.* She listened to the footsteps of her Clanmates as they took Foxclaw's limp body into camp, but Thrushwhisker stayed with her, gently helping her rise to her paws.

She couldn't believe it. Foxclaw was dead. She was *dead.*

No, more than that — she had been *murdered.*

Slowly, gently, the sadness and grief washed away to be replaced with something else.

Anger.

"Daw!" Duskshade's cry echoed though the air. He was at her side the second she staggered into camp, clearly worried. She opened her eyes carefully and surveyed the scene.

Foxclaw had been put down in the middle of camp, Alderbark burying his muzzle in her fur, Brightglow seated beside him.

FernClan had gathered to say one final goodbye to their fallen clanmate.

"Dawnrise, I'm so sorry," Duskshade was meowing, but Dawnrise hardly heard him.

Silvermist darted to her side. "Daw, are you okay?"

Dawnrise sucked in a sharp breath. *Silvermist never called her that.* The ginger molly looked into Silvermist's eyes. Genuine concern was shining in them. Did the silver-striped tabby actually *like* her? Since they were little they had always been enemies, but maybe that had just been Dawnrise's side of the story.

Duskshade and Silvermist flanked her sides as she padded over to her former mentor. Alderbark didn't even glance at her; Dawnrise couldn't even imagine what he was feeling. She had lost her mentor, but he had lost his littermate, his sister, the cat he was closest too. The cat who had seen the ups and downs of his life, who had been there every step of the way.

That was true for Dawnrise too — Foxclaw had always been there, supporting her, helping her become a warrior. She had been more than a mentor. A mother figure, someone to look up too. *A friend.*

She didn't listen as Mintleaf began to recite the words that would send the dead calico off to StarClan. She just rested her head on Foxclaw's shoulder, hating the cold numbness of her former mentor's fur, hating the smell of rosemary and thyme hiding the duller scent death and decay.

She hated everything.

Because whoever did this was going to pay.

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Hi everyone!

I really contemplated ending the chapter when Foxclaw died, but I decided to add the little bit at the end. Also sorry for not publishing for ages, but I had a severe case of writer's block :P
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Who knows how long it'll be until I upload Chapter 10, or even start writing it, but I hope y'all are enjoying the story so far!

Have a good day/night!

- Koa ＜3

Chapter 10

[image]

"Honeybee is *super* happy to be training Thistlepaw," Silvermist was meowing that morning, a few days after the death of Foxclaw.

Dawnrise was still fuming about her former mentor's death, but she was more angry at whoever had killed her than at StarClan for allowing the calico's spirit to join them, rather than staying with her Clanmates below. Dawnrise knew who Foxclaw would have wanted her to be: a loyal cat who served her Clan.

So that's what Dawnrise had been. She'd taken up her usual duties almost immediately after her her mentor's death, even after Dimglow had offered to give her a few days off, as he had granted Alderbark. Dawnrise had refused, though she did spent some time at camp helping the dark ginger tom get through his grief at his sister's death.

Recently, Amberkit and Thistlekit had been apprenticed to Robinflight and Honeybee, who had both been overjoyed at their knew job as mentors. The Clan had also calmed down a bit now that the apprentice den was no longer empty.

"She was hoping to be given the privilege of mentoring Thistlepaw," Silvermist went on. "My father tends to pair up the apprentices with a mentor they seem to get along with."

"Honeybee is a good mentor," Brightglow piped up, having joined them a few moments ago.

Dawnrise glanced over at the pale ginger molly in question. Honeybee was standing over at the tunnel to the apprentices' den, most likely waiting for Thistlepaw to wake up. As she watched, Robinflight padded over and dove into the tunnel to retrieve Amberpaw.

The ginger tabby had noticed Silvermist and Honeybee's blossoming friendship, and she was generally happy that her rival was making friends other than just Brightglow and Duskshade.

She didn't even know If Silvermist *was* her rival anymore. The normally hot-headed molly had been nicer to her since Foxclaw's death, which Dawnrise didn't know if she was relieved or disappointed to no longer squabble with Silvermist.

"Hey," Duskshade greeted them as he wandered over to the three mollies.

Dawnrise, Brightglow and Silvermist all meowed a quick "hi" back, and Duskshade turned his attention to Dawnrise.

"Do you want to go hunting?" he asked her, yellow eyes meeting amber ones.

"Sure," Dawnrise agreed. She felt slightly happier at the idea of spending more time with the dust-brown tabby.

"Are you okay?" Duskshade questioned suddenly, and Dawnrise knew he meant Foxclaw's death.

"I guess," she answered truthfully. "I'm upset, of course, and annoyed, but doing my warrior duties helps."

Silvermist snorted, and three pairs of eyes all pivoted towards her, narrowing.

"Sorry," the silver-striped tabby apologised genuinely. "But Daw sounds like the biggest goody-two-paws ever known to the Clans."

Instantly Foxclaw was taken from Dawnrise's mind, and she playfully whacked her friend on the head with her paw, resulting in a play-fight that left all four of them purring in amusement.

"Let's go hunting now," Dawnrise decided.

"Do you two want to come?" Duskshade offered to Brightglow and Silvermist.

Dawnrise's sister opened her mouth to answer, but Silvermist swiped her tail across the ginger-and-white tabby's mouth and shook her head. There was a gleam in her eye...Dawnrise just couldn't place what it was.

"No, no," she meowed, grinning. "You two enjoy."

Brightglow shot her a puzzled look, but Silvermist just smirked and padded away.

Duskshade shrugged and lead Dawnrise out of camp. The pair decided to hunt close to the stream, which even in leaf-fall was still flowing freely and attracting enough prey to feed the whole Clan. Leaving Duskshade over near the base of a tree, Dawnrise crouched down and started moving carefully over to a clump of bushes.

The scent of mouse hit the roof of the ginger tabby's mouse as she opened her jaws to taste the air. She could hear the creature clearly — digging through under the bushes. In one fluid motion, Dawnrise remembered what Foxclaw had taught her and struck one paw under the bush, grabbing the mouse with her claws and tossing it at a nearby rock. It lay there, stunned, the quick movements from Dawnrise keeping it from even making a sound. She sprinted over and killed it with a bite to the neck.

"Nice catch!" Duskshade's voice echoed around the clearing. Pride laced his tone, even shining in his eyes as he looked at her.

Dawnrise smiled and looked down a the lifeless mouse beside her. "Thanks," she murmured.

The molly glanced up and admired the giant squirrel in her friend's jaws, making sure to compliment his prey as well.

They continued hunting until sunhigh, when Duskshade gathered all his fresh-kill and announced they should head back to camp. Dawnrise agreed, already tired despite the fact that half a day full of warrior duties was yet to be completed. She mentally reminded herself to join a patrol when they got back.

Silvermist, however, had other ideas when they arrived back at

camp. She was conveniently seated beside the fresh-kill pile as Duskshade and Dawnrise dropped their catches onto the ground.

"Hi, you two," she purred, a smile lacing her expression. "Nice hunting?"

"It was, actually," Duskshade answered. He meowed "bye" to both mollies and padded away.

"Come with me," Silvermist practically ordered Dawnrise as soon as he was gone. She turned and lead the way to the edge of camp, not even glancing over her should to see if the ginger and white cat was following.

Dawnrise felt a trickle of confusion and suspicion flow into her, but she hurried after the silver molly without complaining. Brightglow was waiting for them, the small scars that decorated her leg and muzzle reminding Dawnrise yet again of the secrets her sister kept.

"What is —" Dawnrise began to ask, but Silvermist cut her off.

"He likes you."

Those three words caused both Dawnrise and Brightglow to freeze, eyes pinned on the silver molly before them.

Brightglow spoke first. "What?" she exclaimed, but Silvermist wasn't looking at her.

"Who — what — *me*?" the other ginger molly stammered, slightly rushed, a whole wave of confusion threatening to overtake her now. *What did Silvermist mean?*

The silver-striped molly rolled her eyes. "You seriously haven't noticed?" She narrowed her eyes slightly.

Dawnrise shook her head quickly, still oblivious to what Silvermist was telling her. Did someone...like *her*?

"Duskshade," was all the silver molly murmured, blue eyes locked onto something — some*one* — behind her.

Duskshade?

Duskshade liked her?

Duskshade liked her.

Shock ran through Dawnrise like a lightening bolt hitting the ground. Shock and confusion and then finally...joy? Did she like him too? She couldn't answer that. At least she didn't *think* she could.

Dawnrise turned to see what Silvermist was looking at, but she wasn't surprised to see the molly's crystalline eyes had been looking at Duskshade across the camp. The tom's amber gaze was on her, but as their eyes met he smiled and looked away.

"It's very obvious," Silvermist spoke, breaking the silence. "It bet half the camp knows."

Dawnrise turned back to her friends, only to spot something different in Brightglow's sage eyes. Jealousy. *Why would Brightglow be jealous?* She didn't have time to dwell on this however, as the annoying molly opposite her continued meowing.

"Do you like him too? Because he's obviously liked you for a while now." Silvermist grinned. "I can already see your kits."

Dawnrise sucked in a sharp breath. "Kits?" she exclaimed, startled. She hadn't thought about having kits yet. She didn't even know if she *wanted* to have kits. She needed an excuse to leave.

The ginger molly scanned the camp and spotted Treekit, all alone at the base of the rock pile that lead to the nursery. Daisystem was sunning her large belly nearby.

"I'm going to visit Treekit, bye!" she called in a rush to her friends, then hurried away to the safety of where the small brown kit stood.

She struggled to process everything. Duskshade *liked* her? But how did Silvermist know for sure? Did he tell her? And why did Brightglow look jealous? *Did Dawnrise like him back?*

She couldn't exactly say *no,* but she couldn't exactly say *yes,* either.

"Hi, Treekit," Dawnrise greeted the little tom, pushing her thoughts of Duskshade and crushes out of her mind, though she was still aware of his amber gaze following her from across the clearing.

"Hi, Dawnrise!" Treekit meowed, sage eyes brightening upon her arrival. He prodded the moss ball beside him. "Leopardkit and Featherkit don't want to play with me."

"Where are they?" Dawnrise asked, glancing around camp. Yellow eyes met the amber ones of Duskshade, and she quickly looked away, watching the entrance tunnel instead, but of course the dust-brown tom left on a patrol and their eyes met again.

"In the den sleeping," came the slightly upset reply from Treekit.

"Well, let's just play without them," the ginger and white molly suggested, causing the brown tabby to jump in joy.

She picked up the moss ball and threw it in the air. The kit leapt up to catch it, and Dawnrise noted how high he jumped much higher than the average kit. *Treekit was special; she could see it.* He would be a great warrior some day.

Dawnrise continued tossing the moss ball for the small brown tabby, enjoying the growing bond between the two. Duskshade returned from his patrol, and padded over to watch. It made Dawnrise feel a little self conscious after what Silvermist had told her. The brown tabby didn't say anything, he just sat and watched and threw the moss ball whenever it landed near him.

Dawnrise felt a pant of guilt when the sun went down and she hadn't yet joined a patrol, but soon realised that Foxclaw wouldn't be mad at her. She would have wanted her to spend time with Treekit.

She looked up at the stars as they began to shine, Treekit having gone back to his nest not long ago. She stiffened a little as Duskshade joined her, but relaxed again almost immediately. The last of the golden sunset rays shot out across the sky, slowly dying

as the almost full moon rose.

Dusk was beautiful — how had she never noticed it before? How had she almost disliked it?

She sat and watched the stars with Duskshade for a little longer, enjoying his company. They spoke a little, but then subdued into silence, both thinking of Foxclaw's spirit gazing down on them.

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Hi everyone,

This is a bit of a filler chapter, and is a little rushed so there might be some mistakes! I've begun the proper planning for my short story, The Three of Them, so that might come out soon. Though knowing me, I'll probably loose all the motivation for it pretty quickly.

Have a good day/night!

- Koa <3
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